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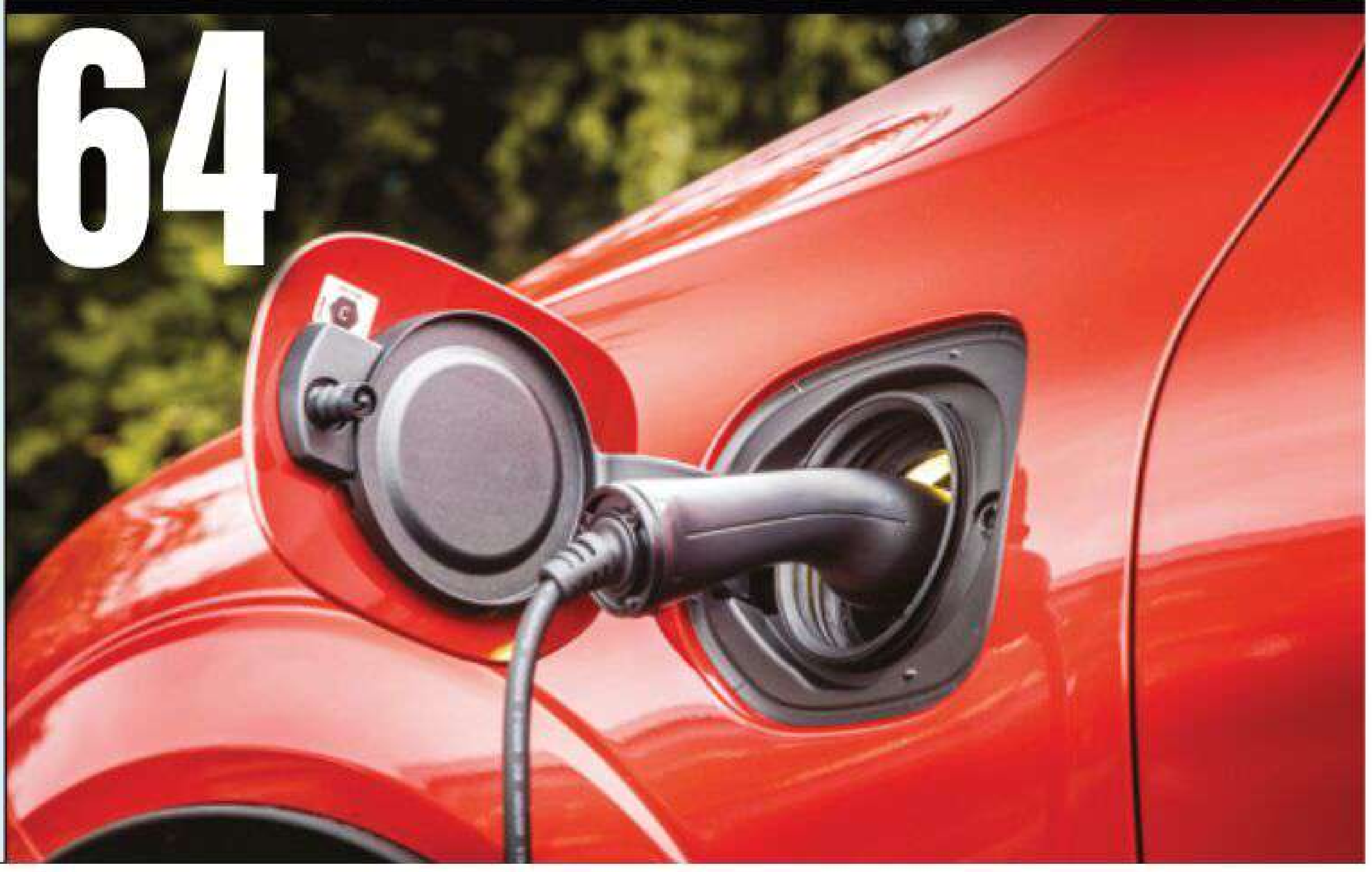

COVER IMAGE: DAVEL5957/ISTOCK

It's been a long time coming, but we are now moving into a post-Covid world of travel. Restrictions remain, vaccinations are necessary, masks are obligatory on most forms of transport, and there are some testing requirements (literally) on some routes, but it's a start. I hope you have already been on a trip or two, but if not, Smart Traveller provides a checklist for the latest challenges and obstacles you may encounter on your journeys.

This issue, we look forward to the reopening of the United States to European travellers by checking out what services are on offer on transatlantic routes from the UK. We also provide a round-up of new and upcoming hotels in Rome, answer some questions about electric cars, and get active with a selection of exciting golf and skiing options in Europe over the next few months.

There's talk of building back better by creating a more sustainable travel experience, and part of that might be reducing the number of trips but extending the duration of them, so decreasing the carbon footprint incurred by flying. If that's true, then we would do well to consider serviced apartments and aparthotels, hence our feature on the new designs many providers are employing. You might want to travel there using high-speed trains across Europe – our feature explains why it's good for both business and leisure, as well as the environment.

We have a long way to go before the world reopens, but the news is optimistic. See you in December. On a plane or a train…

Tom Otley

Tom Otley Editorial director

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ILLUSTRATION: BENJAMIN SOUTHAN

A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER

TIME TO MEET AGAIN:
ISTANBUL

Have a healthy journey with all precautions taken
down to the smallest detail for your in-flight safety.

4 Daily Flights From Heathrow Airport
1 Daily Flight From Gatwick Airport

TURKISH AIRLINES

ALEX MCWHIRTER

Alex has more than 50 years' experience in the business travel industry, including over 40 years as *Business Traveller*'s consumer champion. During the European Year of Rail, Alex explores high-speed trains on the Continent, and discusses why more competition is needed to stimulate growth; turn to page 48.

NAT BARNES

Nat has been driving cars and writing about them for more than 25 years. A member of the World Car of the Year jury, for this issue he offers answers to questions regarding electric and hybrid cars, and rounds up five to watch, including the Peugeot 308 Hybrid and Audi Q4 E-Tron. See what else caught his eye on page 64.

PAUL J DEVRIES

Paul has been following the latest developments in the hotel industry for the past decade, and was previously contributing editor at *Hotel Chatter*. He has covered hotel news for *Business Traveller* in cities around the world. This month he lines up the exciting new properties and upcoming openings in Rome; see page 24.

HANNAH BRANDLER

Our staff writer Hannah reports on all aspects of business travel for the magazine and website. This month she rounds up flight routes from the UK to the US (page 32) to coincide with the reopening of transatlantic travel, and spends four hours exploring London's Hammersmith area on page 70.

BENJAMIN SOUTHAN

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[1] As of Sep 1, 2019. Based on internal ASUS market analysis comparing the size of ExpertBook B9 to competitor products from vendors including Acer, HP, Huawei, Lenovo, Microsoft and Samsung. Actual weight may vary by specs.

[2] Weight may vary according to configuration

[3] Battery life test configuration: Intel® Core™ i7-10510U, 16GB RAM, FHD display, 2TB PCIe® 3.0 x4 SSD, 66Whr. Battery tests conducted by ASUS in August 2018 using the MobileMark® 2014 Office Productivity scenario. Test settings: Wi-Fi enabled, display brightness set to 150nits. Actual battery life may vary depending on product configuration, usage, operational conditions and power management settings. Battery life will decrease over the lifetime of the battery.

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DELTA

BA and Qatar Airways to resume A380 flights

BRITISH AIRWAYS AND QATAR AIRWAYS are both set to resume services with the A380 superjumbo in the coming weeks.

BA will bring back four of its A380 aircraft, with short-haul familiarisation flights this month, followed by long-haul services to Miami, LA and Dubai from December.

At the time of writing it was understood that the short-haul A380 routes would include Frankfurt and Madrid, although this had not been confirmed by the carrier.

Meanwhile, Qatar Airways is to operate A380 flights to Heathrow and Paris CDG in December. The airline had previously stated that it was "not commercially or environmentally justifiable to operate such a large aircraft in the current market", but it has been forced into the move due to issues with its A350 fleet which have resulted in a loss of capacity.

LOUNGE NEWS

VIRGIN ATLANTIC'S GATWICK CLUBHOUSE REBRANDS AS PLAZA PREMIUM LOUNGE

Plaza Premium Group has added its first lounge at London's Gatwick airport, with the rebranding of Virgin Atlantic's North Terminal Clubhouse.

This summer Virgin struck a deal with Plaza Premium for the group to take over the running of its lounges, apart from its flagship Heathrow facility.

The Gatwick lounge is only four years old, and the 1,350 sqm facility can accommodate up to 190 guests, with features including a bar, kid zone, and a contactless food ordering system via smartphones. The facility is open daily from 0600 to 1730.

Plaza Premium also confirmed the Gatwick addition will be followed by two lounge openings at Frankfurt and Budapest airports later this year.

SKYTEAM'S HEATHROW T4 LOUNGE WILL NOT REOPEN

Skyteam has confirmed that its branded lounge at Heathrow Terminal 4 has closed permanently.

The airport's T4 has effectively been closed since May 2020, and is not expected to reopen until at least 2022.

T4 has been the base for Skyteam for some years, but member carriers, including Air France and KLM, have gradually moved into Terminal 3.

A Skyteam spokesperson told *Business Traveller* the lease for the lounge had expired, adding: "With the transfer of operations to Terminal 3, Skyteam Elite Plus, First and Business Class customers are invited to use selected alternative lounges before they fly when travelling from Heathrow."

Heathrow airport was the location for the first Skyteam-branded lounge when it opened in 2009.

IHG OPENS HOLIDAY INN PARIS CDG AIRPORT

IHG HOTELS AND RESORTS has opened its latest Holiday Inn property in the French capital.

Holiday Inn Paris CDG Airport is located ten minutes from the airport by free shuttle bus, and features 250 rooms, and the brand's signature Open Lobby concept with combined reception, restaurant, bar and lounge.

The all-day dining restaurant and bar offers French cuisine with "casual sharing plates prepared with local quality produce".

There is a gym and sauna, 705 sqm of meetings and events space, and customer parking with electric charging stations.

The group also operates the Holiday Inn Express Paris CDG airport, located close to the airport's Terminal 1.

SANDLA /ISTOCK.

Singapore Airlines expands quarantine-free vaccinated travel programme

SINGAPORE AIRLINES has expanded its quarantine-free Vaccinated Travel Lane (VTL) network to 17 cities.

SIA launched VTL services from Amsterdam, Barcelona, Copenhagen, London, Los Angeles, Milan, New York, Paris, and Rome last month, adding to existing flights from Bandar Seri Begawan, Frankfurt and Munich.

The group's subsidiary Scoot also began VTL services from Berlin last month, and SIA is adding flights from Seoul this month.

The VTL programme permits customers to travel quarantine-free between Singapore and eligible destinations, providing they fulfill certain criteria, including having been fully vaccinated in either country with an approved vaccine. *Read our review of a flight from Frankfurt to Singapore under VTL arrangements on page 74.*

Qantas confirms nonstop Darwin-London plans

QANTAS HAS CONFIRMED that it will launch nonstop flights between Darwin and London, following an agreement reached with the Northern Territory government and Darwin airport.

The new Sydney-Darwin-London service launches this month , with Melbourne-Darwin-London set to follow on December 18, although the carrier said that the latter service "could start earlier depending on discussions with the Victorian government on shorter quarantine arrangements for returning travellers".

The Darwin-London service will remain until at least April 2022, when flights are scheduled to switch back to Perth.

Flight QF1 will depart Sydney five times a week at 1830, landing into Darwin at 2125 for refuelling ahead of the 13,800km, 17-hour 20 minute direct journey to London's Heathrow airport.

vueling.com

Vueling to launch six UK routes to Paris Orly

SPANISH LOW-COST CARRIER Vueling is to launch new routes from Paris Orly to European destinations, including six UK services.

The IAG member carrier will offer routes from the Paris airport to Birmingham, Belfast, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Newcastle.

The expansion has been made possible as a result of IAG's acquisition of slots at Paris Orly, enabling the airline to operate 32 new routes from this month.

It is understood that the slots have come from Air France, following a ruling from the EU Commission requiring the French flag carrier to dispose of certain slot pairs.

NEW HOTELS
JOALI BEING

THE MALDIVES IS SET TO WELCOME its second property from eco-friendly hospitality brand Joali this month. Joali Being is a 'nature-immersive wellbeing' retreat on the secluded island of Bodufushi in Raa Atoll and joins its sister resort Joali Maldives on Muravandhoo Island.

The 68 private beach and water villas each feature a pool, customised minibars, an outdoor rain shower, and a butler service. The wellbeing programmes are based on four key pillars: mind, skin, microbiome and energy. There are 39 treatment rooms, a herbology centre and a hydrotherapy hall.

The property is a 40-minute seaplane trip from Male International airport. Each stay is a minimum of five nights.

AMERICAN EXPRESS LOUNGE OPENS AT HEATHROW

AMERICAN EXPRESS HAS OPENED its Centurion lounge at Heathrow Terminal 3. It can be visited by Platinum card and Centurion card holders, and both card holders may bring in two guests per visit. The lounge is also open to Delta Reserve Skymiles card members.

The 650 sqm lounge, which is after security in Terminal 3, is on level 2, and is open from 0600 to 1800.

The lounge's art and design includes British designers for the fixtures and fittings, and art curated by Art Story on show along the corridor which links the different areas in the lounge and also in the rooms.

JACKF/ISTOCK; HELEN ABRAHAM PHOTOGRAPHY

FORMER POLICE STATION TO BECOME HUB BY PREMIER INN

WHITBREAD HAS SECURED planning permission for a new Hub by Premier Inn property in London's Square Mile.

The hotel will be housed within the former Snow Hill Police Station off Holborn Viaduct, with the building's Grade II listed façade being retained.

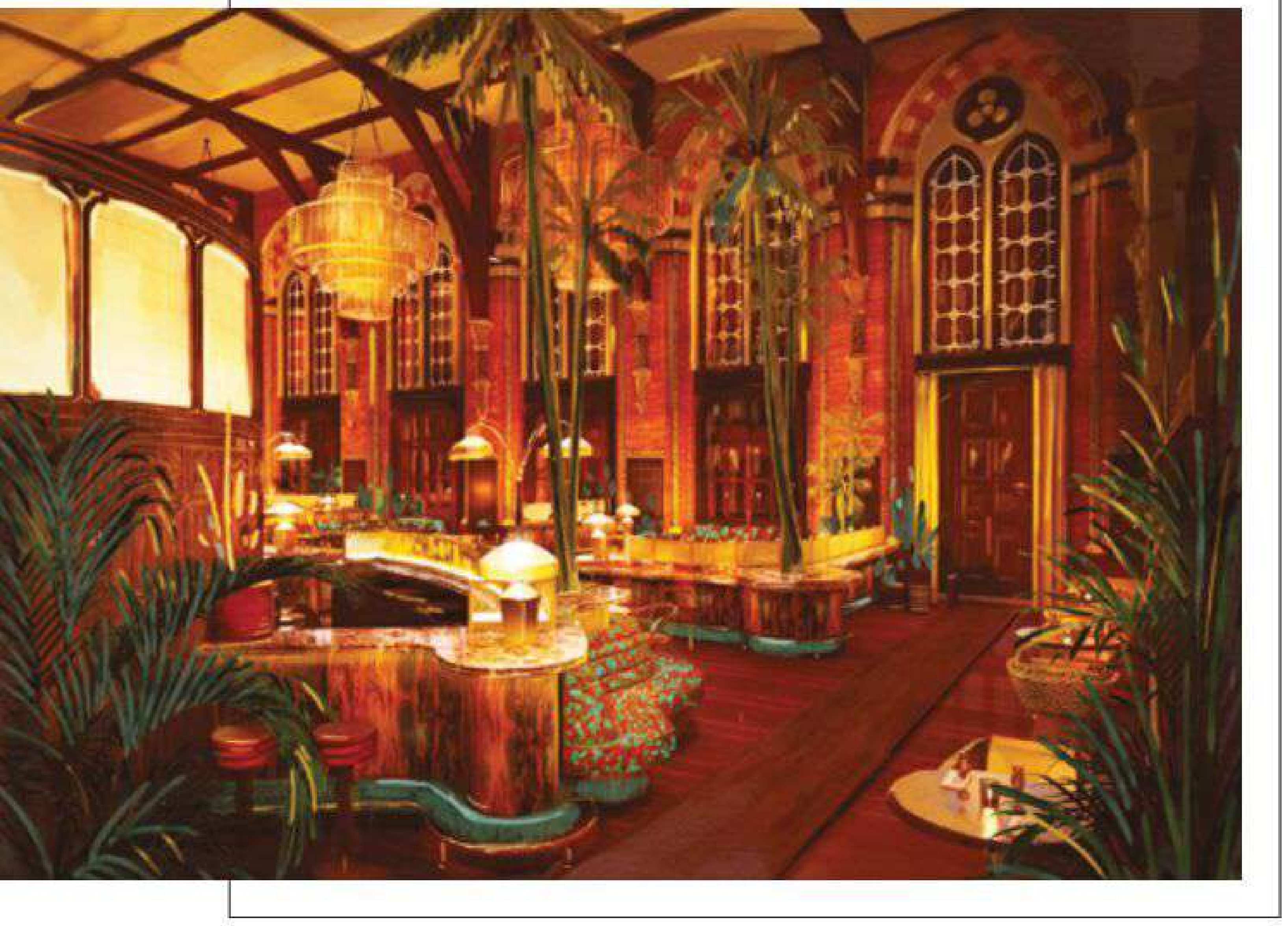
Plans call for a new atrium to be built behind the façade, with the rest of the building remodelled to accommodate 219 rooms.

The hotel will also a feature "a curated cultural offering to celebrate the history of the site", with a permanent exhibition "with narratives of the local and surrounding area such as St Sepulchre Church, the Old Bailey, the former Newgate Prison and the ghost of Cock Lane".

JUST THE TICKET

THE ST PANCRAS RENAISSANCE HOTEL has opened a new all-day bar and restaurant. Booking Office 1869 is a reimagining of the original 19th century St Pancras ticket hall, conceived by Parisian architect and designer Hugo Toro and property developer Harry Handelsman.

The hotel's former bar and restaurant has been replaced by a Victorian-style winter garden with eccentric patterns and fabrics, eight-metre tall palm trees, and a 22-metre long bar which surrounds the original ticket office. Chef Patrick Powell oversees the menu while signature cocktails, including Victoria Sour and Ol'Signalman, have been designed by bar manager Jack Porter.



HUGO TORO

Amsterdam Schiphol trials use of pigs to ward off birds

AMSTERDAM SCHIPHOL airport has launched a new project using foraging pigs to deter birds from flying onto its grounds.

Some 20 pigs are foraging on a two-hectare plot of land between runways 18R-36L and 18C-36C, where sugar beets were recently harvested.

The initiative is monitoring bird activity in the area with pigs compared to a plot without pigs, with the use of a bird radar "which will map the areas at Schiphol and its surroundings that are frequented most by birds".

Schiphol stresses it "is already taking structural measures to keep birds as far away from aircraft as possible", with 20 bird controllers tracking activity at the airport, using technology including sounds and laser beams to keep birds away.

In addition special types of grass are used on the airfield to make it "as unappealing as possible for birds".

SUSTAINABLE TRAVELLER

Considerate hotels

SMALL LUXURY HOTELS OF THE WORLD (SLH) has launched 'Considerate Collection', a sub-set of 26 of its 520 hotels which meet sustainability criteria. The three pillars for the new collection are 'Community Minded', 'Cultural Custodians' and 'Environmentally Conscious', and each hotel has either been certified by a Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) Accredited Certification Body or certified to a GSTC Recognised Standard, or has passed an assessment by the SLH Sustainability Advisory Panel with review by the GSTC. Hotels in the Collection include Keemala, Phuket, the Grove of Narberth, Wales, and The Dylan in Amsterdam.

atmosfair
solarbelt

FUEL OF THE FUTURE

LUFTHANSA HAS MADE AN INVESTMENT in the production of industrially produced, carbon-neutral, electricity-based kerosene. The Lufthansa Group is the partner and pilot customer of the world's first production plant for power-to-liquid aviation fuels. The group has agreed to an annual purchase of at least 25,000 litres for at least five years from the plant in Emsland, Germany. Logistics companies Lufthansa Cargo and Kuehne and Nagel are among the first customers for the kerosene. The plant is operated by Atmosfair and produces synthetic fuel for aircraft from water, CO2 and renewable electricity, a process referred to as power-to-liquid (PtL).

BRITISH AIRWAYS

BRITISH AIRWAYS ADDS SAF OPTION

BRITISH AIRWAYS HAS ADDED A SUSTAINABLE aviation fuel (SAF) option to its carbon offset programme. At the time of booking, passengers can offset their journey and donate to one of three offset projects. They can also choose to buy the equivalent of 10 per cent SAF for their flight.

As an example of pricing, a return flight London-Hong Kong in business class will cost £24.10 to offset, but £151.79 to offset with 10 per cent of emissions covered by SAF.

The initiative came at the launch of the 'BA Better World' programme, with the airline partnering with Airbus to brand its fuel-efficient A320neos in sustainability colours.

The airline also announced a collaboration with BP to source SAF for its flights from London to Glasgow and Edinburgh during the UK COP26 conference. It has bought the equivalent of 100 per cent of SAF for the flights.

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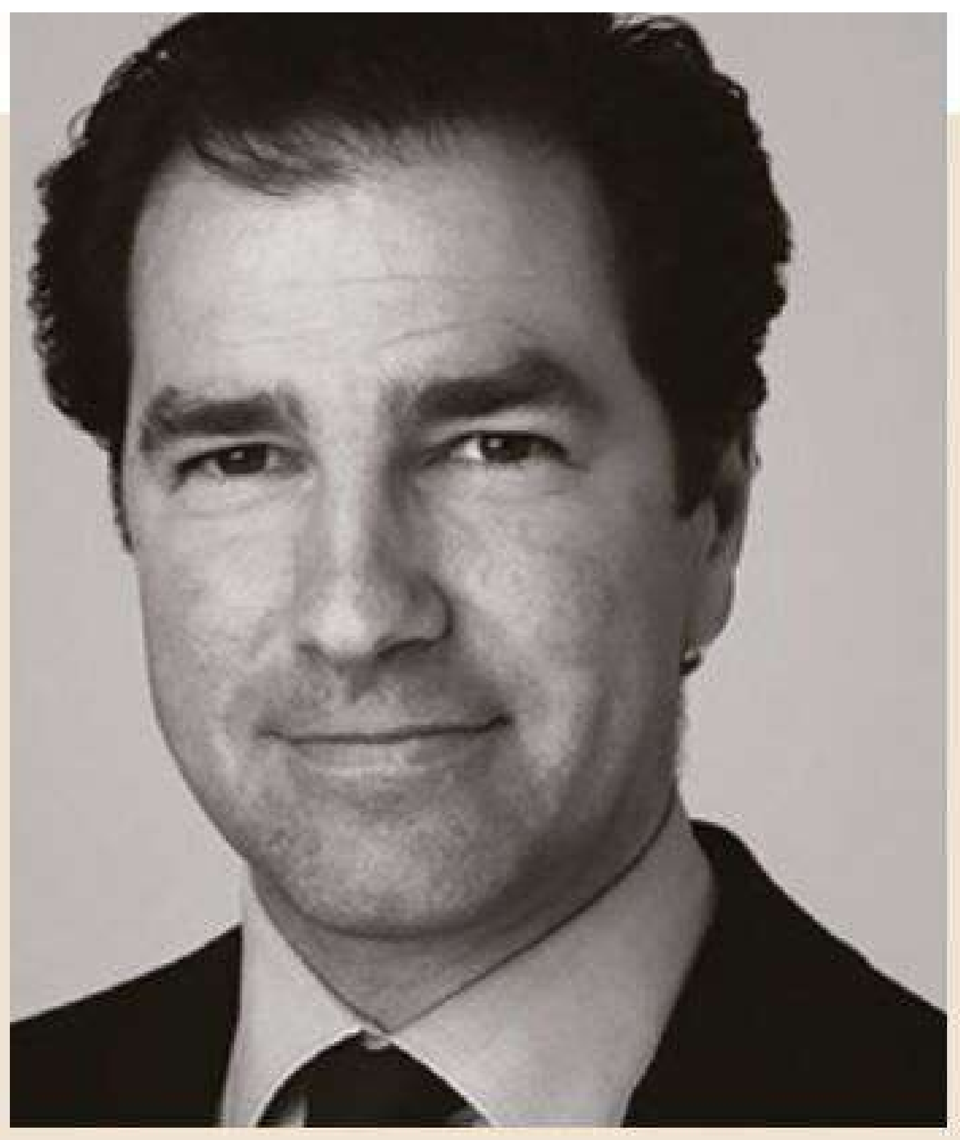
Important information, Business users only: Based on a 22MY I-PACE EV400 SE standard specification, non-maintained. Excess mileage charged at 20.8p per mile +VAT. Must be returned in good condition to avoid further charges. Contract Hire subject to status. 18+ only. This promotion cannot be used together with other manufacturer's promotions and is subject to availability at participating Retailers only for new vehicles registered by 31 December 2021. Contract Hire is provided by Jaguar Contract Hire, a trading style of Lex Autolease Limited, Heathside Park, Heathside Park Road, Stockport SK3 0RB. Model shown may not reflect 22MY specifications. Consult your local Retailer for 22MY specifications. ^Benefit In Kind Tax rates for 2021-22 financial year. ^^Terms and conditions apply for BP pulse subscription. Visit Jaguar.co.uk

NEW ROUTE: PRAGUE

CZECH LOW-COST CARRIER Smartwings has launched a new route between Vaclav Havel Airport Prague and London Heathrow. The new service is initially operating four-times-weekly, with plans to increase this to daily this winter. Flights depart at different times depending on the day of services, as follows: Prague-London: departs 1550 on Monday, 0945 on Thursday, 1400 on Friday and 1850 on Sunday; London-Prague: departs 1745 on Monday, 1205 on Thursday, 1600 on Friday and 2045 on Sunday.

Lead-in fares start from €46 (£39) one-way, and be purchased from either smartwings.com or csa.cz – the Smartwings group owns a 98 per cent stake in Czech Airlines.

British Airways offers flights from London City and Heathrow to Prague, while Easyjet operates from Gatwick and Luton, and Ryanair flies to the Czech capital from Stansted.



AIR MILES

ADRIEN MEYER is the Head of Private Sales at Christie's.

WHAT ATTRACTED YOU TO THE PROFESSION?
It is animated by passion and unpredictability, and no day is the same.

FAVOURITE ARTIST?
Picasso.

WHICH PIECE HAS LEFT A LASTING IMPRESSION?
Peter Paul Rubens' *The Massacre of the Innocents* (1612).

DO YOU COLLECT ART YOURSELF?
I buy sporadically. One of my most treasured pieces is a small sculpture by Jules de Balincourt when he was exhibiting with other students at Hunter College in New York 20 years ago. I fought in a silent bidding auction up to US$145 (£105).

IS IT CHALLENGING TO MOVE FRAGILE WORKS OF ART ACROSS THE WORLD?
We're used to it and have amazing teams who make it happen seamlessly, but I do get nervous if we have to move things in a rush. That's when you need a professional team.

HAS THE PANDEMIC AFFECTED THE AUCTION WORLD?
Hugely – we had to move much of our business online with transactions over digital views and that's why everyone is craving for a return to a more normal pattern. But it also changed our behaviours and many of these innovations have given us even greater reach.

MOST EXPENSIVE PIECE THAT YOU'VE SOLD?
The 1932 Picasso *Femme assise près d'une fenêtre (Marie-Thérèse)* sold last May for US$103 million (£75 million).

HOW DO YOU SOURCE RARE WORKS OF ART?
A mix of discipline and luck.

MOST REWARDING TRAVEL EXPERIENCE?
Meeting an unknown client at a toll station on a Christmas Eve which led to the discovery of a wonderful trove of unlocated works by Claude Monet.

AND MOST CHALLENGING?
Never challenging enough!

HOW ARE YOU ADJUSTING TO THE "NEW NORMAL"?
We are so used to hopping from Zoom to Teams meetings, but I really am missing the thrill of travelling and meeting people face to face.

DREAM DESTINATIONS?
I still haven't been to Istanbul or Tokyo, and I'm longing to visit.

INDISPENSABLE TRAVEL GADGET?
Google Translate.

IFE PICK?
Any TED talk.

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BRZOZOWSKA/ISTOCK

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TO NUR-SULTAN

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air astana

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COVID-19
VACCINATED
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BREATHE EASY

The following percentages represent those who agreed strongly or somewhat with IATA's statements about aspects of air travel.

69%

it was a hassle to arrange required Covid-19 testing

73%

wait times for document checks by authorities were too long; understanding what rules applied to my trip was a real challenge

85%

queuing in the airport was well-managed

86%

the Covid-19 measures made me feel safe while on board

87%

the Covid-19 measures were well-implemented

Source: IATA's Air Traveler Response to Covid-19 survey, September 2021

SIMON WICKSTEAD; BRANDON LAUFENBERG/ISTOCK

POINTS AT THE PEAK

ACCOR'S LOYALTY PROGRAMME ALL is inviting point collectors and mountain enthusiasts to visit its hotel room pop-up at the Zugspitzplatt – Germany's highest mountain. The glass-clad showroom features furniture from the group's Novotel brand, and while travellers can't (yet) spend the night here, there are benefits to reaching the highest hotel room in Germany. Visitors can scan the QR code on the glass façade, sign up for ALL and receive 500 points in the process. These can then be redeemed at a future stay in one of the group's more than 5,100 hotels worldwide – the nearest of which is the Mercure Hotel Garmisch-Partenkirchen just a few kilometres from the Zugspitze cable car valley station.

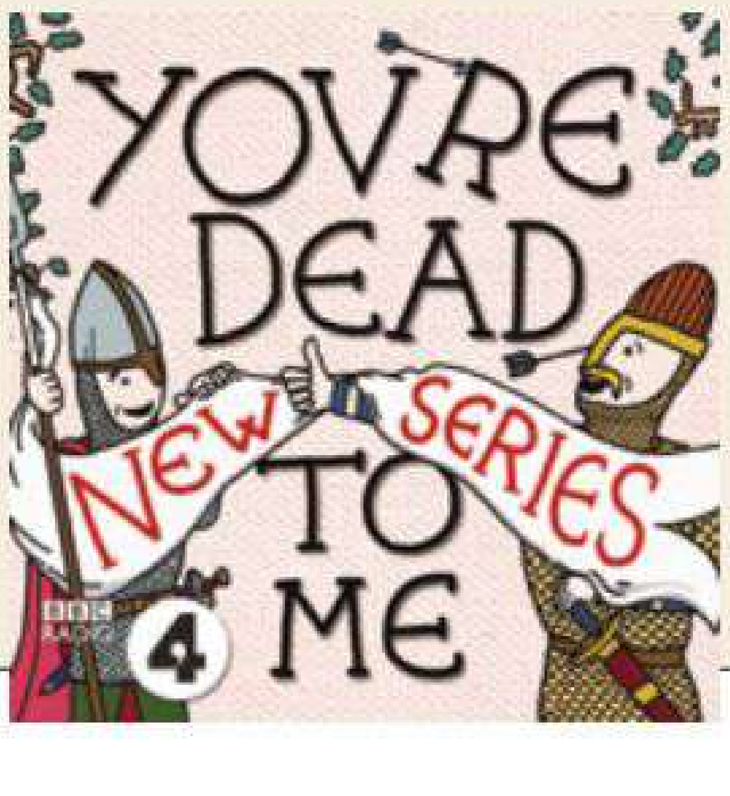
IN-FLIGHT ENTERTAINMENT

Our tips to make time fly by

STANLEY
TUCCI
TASTE
My Life
Through Food

READ: *Taste: My Life Through Food, Stanley Tucci*
The award-winning actor has followed up his recipe books *The Tucci Cookbook* and *The Tucci Table* with this humourous culinary-packed memoir. The book explores the actor's Italian-American upbringing in Westchester, New York, with tales from filming foodie movies *Big Night* and *Julie and Julia*, and tips on crafting the perfect Negroni. Penguin; £20

LISTEN: *You're Dead to Me*
Historian and comedian Greg Jenner presents this light-hearted podcast for BBC Sounds, focusing on a different historical period or figure every week in hour-long episodes. Topics include the history and mystery of Stonehenge, prohibition in the US, and the life of a young Napoleon. Free to download.



WATCH: *Tick Tick... Boom!*
Hamilton's Lin-Manuel Miranda makes his directorial debut with this adaptation of the autobiographical musical by *Rent* creator Jonathan Larson. Andrew Garfield stars as the renowned composer in 1990s New York, who navigates mounting pressures to finish his musical. The film is available to watch on Netflix from November 19, 2021.

ANDREW GARFIELD
tick, tick...
BOOM!

RED
Radisson

Radisson Hotel Group celebrates presence in 10 new UK destinations

While many hotel groups have put their development plans on hold during the past 18 months, Radisson Hotel Group has signed more than 250 hotels worldwide, introduced a new brand, entered the serviced apartments arena and gained presence in 10 new UK destinations.

In 2020, the company opened its first dual branded property at London Heathrow airport, Radisson RED London Heathrow and Radisson Hotel & Conference Centre London Heathrow, with 258 rooms and 637 rooms, respectively. Earlier this year, it doubled its UK Radisson RED presence with the opening of Radisson RED London Gatwick Airport and Radisson RED London Greenwich The O2, and the group looks forward to welcoming Radisson RED Liverpool and Radisson RED Newcastle in 2022 and 2023.

New properties are also being added to the portfolio of Radisson Blu, the largest upper upscale brand in Europe for 10 consecutive years, including the signing of the historic Radisson Blu Hotel Perth. Once a favorite hotel of Queen Victoria, the property will be beautifully restored to become the crown jewel of the Scottish city when it opens in 2022. Also in the pipeline is Radisson Blu Hotel, Sheffield, forming part of a large-scale commercial, retail, leisure and residential development in the city and scheduled to open in 2023. Moving further south in the UK, Park Inn by Radisson recently opened the doors on its latest hotel in Bournemouth.

Brand new

Radisson Hotel Group has debuted a new brand, Radisson Individuals, which launched in the UK with Henrietta House in Bath and, after international expansion, welcomed River Ness Hotel, in Inverness. The group is excited to announce its first Radisson Individuals signing at a sports venue within the UK by the end of the year.

Serviced Apartments

Elsewhere, Radisson Hotel Group has achieved great success with its Serviced Apartments, setting a target to more than double its portfolio across all brands within the next five years across EMEA.

Adela Cristea, Vice President, Head of Business Development UK & Ireland, Radisson Hotel Group, said: "We are very proud of the recent signings and openings completed in the past 18 months in the UK and Ireland, across our brand portfolio. We have signed and opened 10 hotels across the UK, totalling more than 1,200 rooms, which is an impressive achievement given the circumstances faced during this time."

TOP: Radisson RED London Greenwich The O2; **BELOW:** Henrietta House, Bath; Radisson RED Liverpool

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LOST IN TRANSLATION

Idioms from around the world that have us scratching our heads. This issue, it's a Swedish expression.

Phrase: *Att glida in pa en rakmacka*

Literally: To slide in on a prawn sandwich

Meaning: To have an easy life/have it handed to you on a plate

Origin: No luck on the roots of this phrase, but likely that it comes from prawn (or shrimp) being an expensive delicacy

Business Traveller COMPETITION

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BUSINESS TRAVELLER has teamed up with Seville's Hotel Adriano to offer one lucky reader and guest a two-night stay in a standard double room with breakfast.

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For the full terms and conditions and to enter, visit businesstraveller.com/competitions

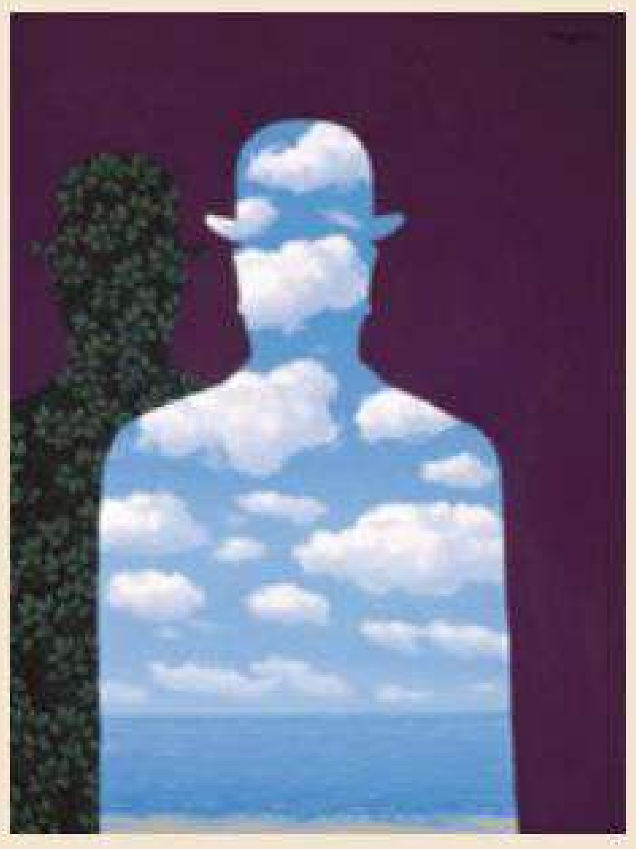
TIME OUT

Our pick of events taking place around the world

DOMESTIC: JOHNNIE WALKER PRINCES STREET, EDINBURGH

Diageo has opened a new eight-floor museum in the Scottish capital celebrating the world's bestselling Scotch whisky. Facilities include tastings led by specialists at the Explorers' Bothy bar, two rooftop bars featuring skyline views, and a vault with limited-edition bottles. Tickets start from £25 and include a tour and three personalised whisky samples.

SHORT-HAUL: THE MAGRITTE MACHINE, MADRID, UNTIL JANUARY 30, 2022



The Thyssen-Bornemisza National Museum is hosting the first retrospective devoted to surrealist icon René Magritte in Madrid since 1989. The exhibition is divided into six chapters and displays more than 90 paintings by the Belgian artist, including *High Society* (1956/66) as well as an installation of photos and films on the first floor Balcony Gallery. Tickets from €13 (£11).

LONG-HAUL: SUMMIT ONE VANDERBILT, NEW YORK

What better way to reunite with the Big Apple than at the city's new observatory experience atop the One Vanderbilt skyscraper in Midtown. Experience views of the Chrysler Building, Empire State Building and Central Park on the terrace, or levitate in the sky boxes – two glass ledges suspended 1,000 feet above Madison Avenue. Plus there's dining from Danny Meyer, and an all-glass elevator with a transparent floor. Tickets from US$39 (£28).

GRAEME MACDONALD STUDIO; FUNDACION TELEFONICA/RENE MAGRITTE, VEGAP, MADRID, 2021; ISTOCK

Join the debate

READERS SHARE FIRST-HAND KNOWLEDGE, EXPERIENCES AND IDEAS

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ITEM LEFT BEHIND ON LUFTHANSA FLIGHT

➜ LUGANOPIRATE

Arriving in Frankfurt from Johannesburg with Lufthansa, and in Mrs LP's hurry to get off the plane (as we expected long queues at immigration while we showed our Covid forms), I managed to leave my Samsung tablet in the seat pocket.

I only realised at security but by then it was too late to go back. I asked in the lounge and was directed to a website where I had to fill in a form. To cut a long story short I just received an email saying it was found and giving me the option to collect it in person or have it couriered to me. I was astounded to see it will cost me €138.59 (£118) with sending costs, admin fee, credit card fee and VAT!

This compares with precisely nothing when I did the same thing on an internal flight in South Africa. I had it back in just 40 minutes and for some reason naively thought it would be as fast and efficient at Frankfurt.

The lesson, I guess, is to double-check every seat pocket before getting off and not be rushed by anyone.

➜ GIUSEPPE

Someone has to bear the costs of shipping. In this case, I see no faults by the carrier. All airlines are using third parties to forward items to customers. I forgot a jacket on board an Emirates flight a couple of years ago and I spent €80 (£68) to get it back. Same options: to be collected in person or shipping.

➜ STEVEN

Flight in first class from Chicago O'Hare International to Frankfurt connecting to Edinburgh. On arrival in Frankfurt I was handed my blue blazer by one of the flight attendants. On arrival in the First Class Terminal, where I had an approximately 3.5 hour connection, I discovered that I had been handed the wrong blue blazer (his grandmother's matzo ball soup recipe in the inside pocket alerted me). I recalled a fellow passenger with a similar blazer across the aisle and my assumption was that we each had been given the wrong item. The staff at the terminal tracked the passenger down to find that he had travelled about 45 minutes from the airport. They took his blazer and rushed it to his location, exchanged the item and delivered my blazer to me. Exceptional service by Lufthansa staff and two very happy passengers.

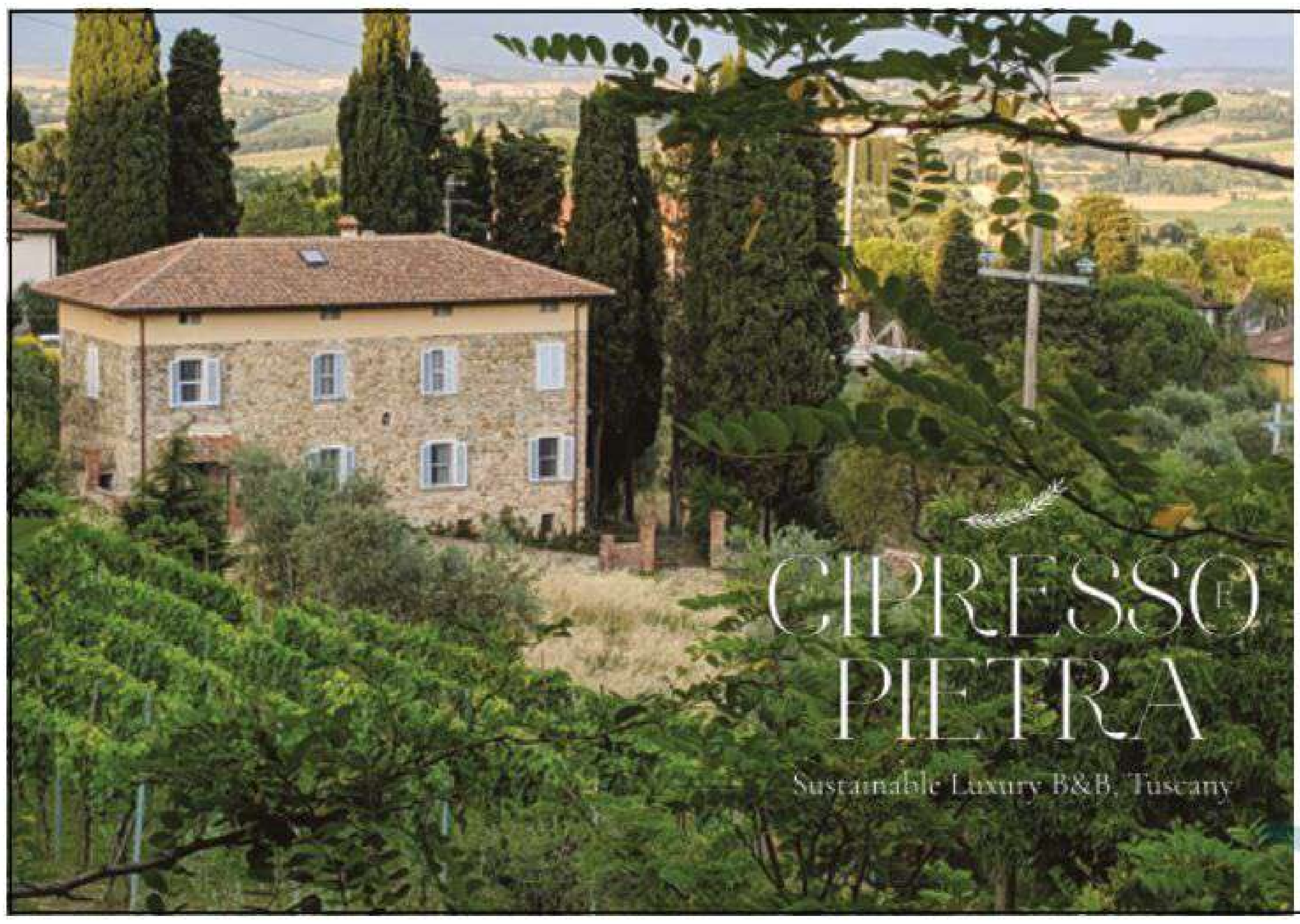
➜ ASK1945

A few years back I arrived home from Singapore and, as I went up to my front door, I realised that I didn't have my keys. I had no idea where on this journey I might have lost them. I used our daughter's copy to get in and had a new set cut.

Ten days later a courier turned up at my front door with my keys. Apparently, they had fallen out of my jacket pocket at security. They traced me through the Sentinel Gold tag attached to them. I wasn't charged anything.

➜ FAROFLYER

A few years back I flew into Luton on Easyjet. It was a very short trip to meet a customer in Luton, then to the Midlands. I had gathered my bags and placed my passport on the empty seat next to me ready to run to pick up a car. As I approached passport control, I realised that my passport was still on the seat where I had left it. Never mind, in those days I had a spare passport so continued to my meeting and returned a few hours later to recover my passport. Easyjet's lost property was confused as to how I was returning to collect my passport, then advised me that they had handed it to Immigration. I wandered to the Immigration office to claim my passport. The young lady



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said that she did have my passport but asked if I had any identification. I told her that I looked remarkably like the photo in the passport that she was holding.

➜ SUPERCHRIS

I was on a flight with Mrs SuperChris from Qatar to Melbourne about ten years back (row 1, very comfortable), and woke up to see my wife nervously fiddling with the side of the seat's innards. After some time, she admitted her watch had dropped down the back of the seat. We spent a few minutes looking, after which I said, 'Look darling, let's get you a new one; it wasn't too expensive.' That didn't seem to placate her and she had to then admit, for reasons still unclear to me ten years on, that she had attached her engagement ring to it!

As we were an hour out from landing, staff had a go involving coat hangers and torches with no luck. After landing the staff were adamant we leave, and [said] they would get engineers on and return to us at the carousel – I completely refused and said I would wait. Waited about 30 minutes for an engineer to come on-board to successfully dismantle part of the seat and return said watch and ring.

Got to the baggage carousel last (obviously) to find someone had walked off with our luggage which then took a week to get returned.

I always smile now when certain carriers make a very specific announcement about anything dropped into the seats to get help rather than try and retrieve yourself as I think we were partly responsible for that!

FROM ONE EXTREME TO THE OTHER

➜ DAVIDSMITH2

I offer this in the full expectation that some of you will be able to trump me without too much trouble, but here goes.

We fly Accra-London in two weeks – BA A350, capacity 331 pax, speed 488 kn. After a stopover in London and train to Exeter, we then fly on a DH Twin Otter – capacity 17 pax, speed 145 kn, on to the Isles of Scilly.

Obviously an A380 would have been an even more impressive contrast – or we could have taken the train to Penzance and got on the 8-seater Islander aircraft – but it'll still make for quite a contrast of size, speed, space and service. Fortunately (for me) I don't think they weigh you on the Otter. I think they do on the Islander, to keep things balanced.

Anyway – I await your tales of even greater extremes!

ESSELLE

In 1993, I flew BA on a B767 in economy to Bahrain. During the flight I went to the cockpit and sat in the first officer's seat, smoking a cigarette with the captain.

I then flew from Bahrain to Dubai on Gulf Air, and subsequently on the 8-seater seaplane that in those days operated from the Creek to Abu Dhabi. We sat waiting for the last passenger to join, who would sit in the empty seat next to me.

After some time, a Land Rover pulled up; a somewhat overweight and sweaty Brit ran down to the plane, boarded, and sat down next to me. We realised we had been at school together some 25 years earlier.

FORMERBA

Many years ago, my wife and I flew to Fiji from London and were due to stay in a resort on Malolo Lailai.

We had flown first class from London and then business class from Sydney to Nadi where we were picked up and taken to a port to connect, we were told, with a ferry.

We were left on the dock with two Delsey hardshell suitcases with BA first class snob tags flapping in the breeze. We were both decently attired for the Sydney lounge visit, but no boat, no ferry, no other passengers! Just two overdressed tourists!

Ten minutes passed and a small rowing boat with an outboard motor appeared on the horizon and duly arrived at the dock. We got in, the bags perched on a seat, and we headed towards an island some way off, but my attention was on the blackest most evil-looking storm clouds I had ever seen. We arrived just ahead of the storm at our "resort" which didn't have a jetty, so we had to wade ashore. I don't think I have ever looked more ridiculous!

INQUISITIVE

My first international flight experience included quite extreme aircraft type.

The itinerary was Delhi to Lafayette in Louisiana. Delhi to New York via London was in a B747, then New York to New Orleans in a DC 9 and New Orleans to Lafayette in a very small turboprop with only seven seats. It was parked at the last gate and we had to go down to the tarmac. We saw a small plane with one man checking the engine in front. He greeted us and said he was the pilot, and told us to board. He placed our luggage in a hold and closed the door from outside. He then hopped onto the pilot seat and spoke from a cut-out between the pilot cabin and passenger cabin indicating that he would take off soon, and we should fasten our seat belts. It was a 30-minute flight and a bit scary initially, but exciting as well.

➜ NEVERECONOMY

For many years I flew all round the world in style on a range of widebodies, but always had the last leg home to Maryland on a Shorts 360 (the flying Winnebego) or a prop plane (which I can no longer identify), which had no flight attendant, no toilet and the captain had to kneel to get in the cockpit. That was always the best flight of the whole trip as it meant going home.

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NEW HOTELS IN ROME

Rome is ready for the return of business travellers with new hotels opening and more planned

WORDS PAUL J DEVRIES

Spend a day strolling through Rome's ancient streets and visiting its plethora of monuments and museums, followed by an evening of *aperitivo* and food on one of its historic piazzas, and it's easy to see why the city is a magnet for tourists.

Despite Milan's reputation as the country's centre of commercial activity, Rome also attracts its fair share of business travellers, ranking higher than its rival as a city for meetings and events. It offers both individual hotels with significant conference facilities (Rome Cavalieri – one of Hilton's Waldorf Astoria hotels – can host up to 5,500 delegates) and vast spaces suitable for trade fairs or congresses at Fiera Roma or La Nuvola Roma convention centres.

Overall, the City of Seven Hills drew in excess of 10 million international visitors in 2019, making it one of Europe's most popular destinations. Anticipating the new decade, it was getting ready for an influx of new hotels, with major brands including The Hoxton, Bulgari, Six Senses, and Rosewood set to inject some much-needed new life into the city's inventory.

Following the pandemic's inevitable impact on the industry, Rome began to welcome the first tranche of new hotels in the spring of this year. This continued over the summer months, as it celebrated Italy's victory in both the European football championship and Eurovision. Much more is in store between now and 2023 – here's a selection of noteworthy recent arrivals and upcoming openings.

NEW

DOUBLETREE BY HILTON ROME MONTI

In April, the seventh Doubletree by Hilton hotel in Italy opened with 133 rooms on Piazza dell'Esquilino in Rione Monti, a short walk from the city's Termini railway station.

The ground floor public spaces include restaurant Mamalia and MiT Food and Coffee Brewery, which has an outdoor patio. Rooftop cocktail bar Mun has views of the ancient Basilica Papale di Santa Maria Maggiore across the piazza.

Hilton will also open the 439-room Hilton Rome Eur La Lama in August 2022, south of the city in the EUR business district. It will have direct access to La Nuvola Roma convention centre, which can host up to 8,000 delegates. It will have seven meeting rooms with a total of 857 sqm event space. The new hotel will also offer an executive lounge, an all-day dining outlet and lobby bar, as well as a 15th floor fine dining restaurant. **doubletree.hilton.com hilton.com**

LEFT: Doubletree by Hilton Rome Monti rooftop bar; **ABOVE:** A Roomy Balcony room at The Hoxton, Rome

THE HOXTON, ROME

Following its continental European additions in Amsterdam and Paris, The Hoxton marked an expansion milestone in May with the brand's tenth hotel in Rome. Set inside a 1970s building in Parioli, north-east of Villa Borghese, there are 192 rooms ranging from Shoebox to Biggy. They draw inspiration from classic Italian cinema and mid-century Italian design, with the Roomy Terrace category adding outdoor space with garden furniture.

All-day eatery Cugino is run in collaboration with a local restaurant and micro-bakery. There is a large lobby and outdoor terrace, and a cluster of five meeting rooms with communal kitchen. In September, Beverly opened as the hotel's second restaurant, with a 'West Coast American' farm-to-table concept.

The Hoxton is set for further growth as part of the joint venture agreed last year between Ennismore (its parent company) and Accor, the French hotel industry giant. A new entity – also called Ennismore – brings no less than 12 Accor lifestyle →

brands together, from 25 Hours and Mama Shelter to SO/ and The Hoxton, with 100+ new hotels in the pipeline.
thehoxton.com

ROOM MATE FILIPPO

Spanish group Room Mate Hotels – brainchild of hotelier Kike Sarasola – opened its fourth Italian hotel in June in the form of Room Mate Filippo. With each hotel in the group built around a specific fictional character, here Filippo is an 'exhibition curator who researches the history of the Eternal City'.

A short walk from Piazza di Spagna, the hotel's interiors are by Tomas Alia, inspired by the 1940s and using 'palm trees as a poetic and inspirational element'. In addition to 30 hotel rooms, there is the choice of 11 Gran Filippo Apartments. Filippo joins existing Italian Room Mate hotels Isabella and Luca (in Florence) and Giulia (in Milan).
room-matehotels.com

MAMA SHELTER

On July 1, Mama Shelter Rome arrived in the city's Prati district providing 217 rooms, bursting with bold patterns and bright colours, including pale green accent walls in the rooms and canary yellow ceilings in the bathrooms.

It's the first Italian hotel of the brand (like The Hoxton, part of the Ennismore lifestyle portfolio of Accor), and the first hotel with Mama Baths offering a pool, sauna, steam room, and relaxation areas. A large rooftop terrace has views over Vatican City and Saint Peter's Basilica.

Mama Shelter is heading to Lisbon and Dubai next.
mamashelter.com

W ROME

Opening this month, W Rome brings the brand's signature style to two 19th century buildings on Via Liguria, next to the Spanish Steps.

There are 147 rooms and 15 suites, ranging from entry-level Fabulous to the Extreme WOW suite with a private 140 sqm rooftop terrace. The style is luxurious – light wood floors contrast with red velvet curtains, and dark oak and polished brass cabinets.

Sicilian chef Ciccio Sultano is overseeing the kitchens at the hotel, including in Giano Restaurant, which offers indoor and outdoor seating. The W Living Room is on the ground floor – attractions include a hidden door in the public bathroom that gives access to the hotel's secret garden, Parlapiano.

The rooftop has a WET Deck with outdoor pool and Otto Rooftop bar and lounge.
w-hotels.marriott.com

TOP: The lounge at Room Mate Filippo; **ABOVE:** Large Mama room at Mama Shelter

FRANCIS AMIAND

ABOVE: Premium room with terrace at Anantara Palazzo Naiadi **BELOW:** Studio Suite at W Rome

THIERRY DELSART

SOHO HOUSE ROME

Soho House continued its foray into European capitals with the planned autumn opening of a new ten-storey property in San Lorenzo, offering 49 rooms and 20 long-stay apartments.

In addition to its usual members' club spaces, there is a deli bar and lounge on the ground floor, a rooftop with bar and pool, a screening room, and health club with gym. The group is working on a property in Milan as part of its European expansion plan. **sohohouse.com**

ANANTARA PALAZZO NAIADI

Anantara, part of Minor Hotels (which includes brands NH and Avani Hotels), is quickly establishing a European footprint through a series of conversions, including Grand Hotel Krasnapolsky in Amsterdam, and New York Palace in Budapest.

In Rome, it is converting Palazzo Naiadi, a 19th-century neoclassical building next to the city's Termini Station and near the ruins of the Diocletian Baths. There are 238 rooms and suites, some of which are in the Clementino wing, previously the Vatican's granary. F&B include seasonal dishes on the rooftop terrace, which has an outdoor pool. **anantara.com**

COMING SOON

BULGARI ROME

With just six hotels today, Bulgari will nearly double its portfolio over the next few years with openings in several cities, including Paris, Moscow and Tokyo. In Italy, the original Bulgari Milan will get a sister hotel in Bulgari Rome in 2022, inside a 1930s modernist building opposite the Ara Pacis and Mausoleum of Augustus.

The majority of its 100 accommodations – like all other Bulgari hotels designed by Antonio Citterio and Patricia Viel – will be suites, and the top floor will feature its Il Ristorante restaurant and The Bulgari Bar.

The brand's flagship store on Via dei Condotti is a few minutes' walk away – to celebrate the hotel's upcoming opening, the jeweller has designed the 'Bulgari Ospitalita Italiana Necklace', a choker with ten precious stones representing its first ten hotel destinations. **bulgarihotels.com**

THE ROME EDITION

Next year will see Marriott's Edition hotels open in two very different European cities: Rome and Reykjavik – joining recent arrivals in Tokyo, Shanghai and Los Angeles.

The Rome Edition will have 95 rooms and suites in an early 20th century building on Piazza Barberini, designed by Cesare Pascoletti in collaboration with Marcello Piacentini, one of Italy's most famed architects of Rationalism. F&B will be a focus for the hotel, including a signature restaurant with outdoor space, a Punch Room Bar, and a

→

rooftop terrace. The rooftop will also have a pool.

By 2023, Edition plans to add a second Italian hotel in Milan, while also adding a sister hotel to its Barcelona property in Madrid. **editionhotels.com**

SIX SENSES ROME

Having opened a resort on the northern coast of Ibiza this year, Six Senses Hotels will add Italy to its growing list of European destinations in 2022. Palazzo Salviati Cesi Mellini, an 18th century building on Piazza di San Marcello, midway between the Pantheon and Trevi Fountain, is being refurbished to have 95 rooms and suites. There will be 'a range of quirky room types', with interiors by Spanish designer Patricia Urquiola. The ground floor will have a trattoria and bar with open kitchen, and a botanical garden, while the rooftop terrace will have 360-degree views of the city. The Six Senses Spa on the first floor will have treatment rooms, a fitness centre and relaxation areas.

Six Senses is working on hotels in London (the former Whiteleys department store in Bayswater, with 110 rooms) and New York (part of The XI, a set of twisting towers by architect Bjarke Ingels along the High Line). It will also open ski resorts in Switzerland and Austria. **sixsenses.com**

INTERCONTINENTAL ROME AMBASCIATORI PALACE

Having previously managed the Hotel de la Ville (now part of Rocco Forte), IHG Hotels and Resorts will make a return to the Italian capital with its Intercontinental brand when it opens Intercontinental Rome Ambasciatori Palace early next year.

Built in 1900 on Via Veneto to host ambassadors staying in Rome, the property will house 160 contemporary rooms and suites, alongside a range of public areas, including a restaurant, bar and spa. **ihg.com**

TOP: Bulgari Rome; **ABOVE RIGHT:** Rosewood Rome; **BELOW LEFT:** Intercontinental Rome Ambasciatori Palace restaurant

ROSEWOOD ROME

As part of its rapidly expanding global footprint, Rosewood Hotels is adding a range of European cities to its portfolio, including Madrid, Amsterdam, Munich and Vienna. In Italy, Rosewood Rome will be the brand's fourth Italian hotel when it opens in 2023, joining the existing Rosewood Castiglion del Bosco in Tuscany, and future openings in Porto Cervo (Sardinia) and Venice.

Occupying three buildings from the early 1900s, the hotel will encompass the former Banca Nazionale del Lavoro on Via

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Veneto – like the Rome Edition by architect Marcello Piacentini. BAR Studio will be responsible for the interiors, with a total of 113 rooms and 44 suites.

There will be a contemporary Italian bistro, a lobby bar, and rooftop bar and terrace. The bank's original vault will be turned into a modern Roman bathhouse, while the brand's Sense Spa will be on the top floor.

The following year should see the arrival of The Chancery Rosewood, the group's second London hotel, inside the Eero Saarinen-designed former US Embassy in Mayfair. **rosewoodhotels.com**

ORIENT EXPRESS HOTEL DE LA MINERVE

When Accor launched its Orient Express hotel brand in 2019, a first hotel was set to open a year later inside Bangkok's ultra-modern pixelated MahaNakhon skyscraper. With interiors by Tristan Auer, it would have been the second incarnation for the hotel portion of the mixed-use building, originally announced as The Bangkok Edition.

With that hotel due to open as The Standard Bangkok instead, Orient Express has set its sights on opening in Rome in 2024. The 17th century Grand Hotel de la Minerve, around the corner from the Pantheon and run by the Billi family for 30 years, will undergo a 20-month transformation to become the first Orient Express hotel in Italy. **orient-express.com**

ABOVE: Orient Express Hotel de la Minerve; **BELOW:** Public space at Citizen M

CITIZEN M ISOLA TIBERINA

Part of ambitious plans in Italy with a focus on Rome and Milan, the first Citizen M hotel will open in 2023 along the Lungovetere, facing Tiber Island. Converting a 1950s building by architect Eugenio Montuori, the Dutch brand will bring its signature look to 160 compact accommodations and public spaces filled with Vitra furniture. **citizenm.com**

BRACH ROME

Evok Collection, a small French group with five hotels in Paris and three luxurious private chalets in Courchevel 1850, is branching out to Italy and Spain with a number of new openings. Following its collaboration with Philippe Starck on Brach Paris – inside a former postal sorting centre in the 16th arrondissement – it will work with the designer to open Brach Rome in 2023.

Steps from the historic Piazza del Popolo, the hotel will have just 62 rooms and suites, a signature restaurant, rooftop, and a fitness club with a 25-metre pool.

Brach Rome will be the third Brach hotel when it opens, with another property in Madrid due next year. Meanwhile, its Nolinski brand is also expanding, with the characterful Nolinski Paris set to get a sister hotel in Venice. **evokhotels.com**

NHOW ROME

Alongside the conversion of Palazzo Naiadi into an Anantara Hotel, Minor Hotels is also working on turning the existing NH Collection Vittorio Veneto, inside a 1968 modernist building on Via Veneto, into Nhow Rome. An opening date for the hotel, 'where old and new not only coexist but crash into each other with full speed', is not yet announced. **nhow-hotels.com**

CORINTHIA HOTEL ROME

Corinthia Hotels will redevelop the former seat of the Central Bank of Italy, on Piazza del Parlamento, into a luxury hotel set to open in the first half of 2023. Details on the number of rooms and suites are to be confirmed, but they will wrap around a central garden. There will be restaurants and bars, a spa, and a rooftop.

Additional hotels are in progress in cities ranging from Brussels to Bucharest, alongside the conversion of the former Surrey Hotel on Manhattan's Upper East Side into Corinthia New York, its first hotel in the Americas. **corinthia.com** BT

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Transatlantic routes

As the US reopens to flights from the UK, the EU and other nations, here's an overview of service times, aircraft type and what's included in each cabin

As the US reopens to fully vaccinated visitors from the EU, the UK and several other nations from November 8, we look at the current state of play for direct routes from the UK to the US across the major carriers, including the frequency of the service, aircraft type and configuration, and an overview of what's included in each cabin – from meals to wifi and luxury amenity kits.

Note that the seat you book will vary depending on the route and aircraft type, and that the route launches included in the feature are subject to change.

AER LINGUS

Routes: Manchester-New York JFK (daily from December 1; A321 LR); Manchester-Orlando (four-times weekly from December 11; A330-300); Manchester-Boston (launches summer 2022; A321 LR)

Configuration: A321 LR (168 Economy, 16 Business); A330-300 (287 Economy, 30 Business)

What's included?

Economy: IFE and earphones; complimentary meal and drinks; wifi (for purchase); blanket and pillow

Business: fully lie-flat seats; IFE and earphones; complimentary meal and drinks; complimentary wifi; blanket and pillow

The US reopens to fully vaccinated visitors from the EU and the UK from November 8

ABOVE: Business class seats on American Airlines' B777-300; **LEFT:** Aer Lingus A321 LR

AMERICAN AIRLINES

Routes: Heathrow-Boston (daily; B777-200); Heathrow-Charlotte (daily; B777-200); Heathrow-Dallas (twice daily; B777-300); Heathrow-New York JFK (twice daily; B777-300); Heathrow-Los Angeles (daily; B777-300); Heathrow-Miami (daily; B777-300); Heathrow-Chicago (daily; B777-200); Heathrow-Philadelphia (daily; B777-200); Heathrow-Seattle (daily; B777-200)

Configuration: B777-300 (216 Economy, 28 Premium, 52 Business, 8 First); B777-200 (212 Economy, 24 Premium, 37 Business)

What's included?

Economy: IFE with earphones; live TV (on select flights); complimentary meal, drinks and snacks; wifi (for purchase); blanket and pillow

Premium Economy: IFE and noise-reducing headphones; live TV (on select flights); complimentary meal, drinks and snacks; wifi (for purchase); Shinola and DS and Durga amenity kit; blanket and pillow

Business: fully lie-flat seats; IFE and Bang and Olufsen headphones; live TV on select flights; complimentary meal, drinks and snacks; wifi (for purchase); Shinola and DS and Durga amenity kit; blanket and pillow

First: fully lie-flat seats in suites; IFE and Bang and Olufsen headphones; live TV on select flights; complimentary meal, drinks and snacks; wifi (for purchase); Shinola and DS and Durga amenity kit; sleep kit; blanket and pillow →

AER LINGUS

Aircraft type and class	Seat layout	Seat pitch	Seat width	Recline	Seat-back screen	Audio-Video on demand	Power source	Wifi
A321neo LR								
Economy	3-3	31"	18"	4.5"	YES 9"	YES	YES	YES
Business	1-1/2-2	49"	22"	Flat in bed mode	YES 16"	YES	YES	YES
A330-300								
Economy	2-4-2	31"	17"	5"	YES 9"	YES	YES	YES
Business	1-2-1/1-2-2	49"	22"	Flat in bed mode	YES 16"	YES	YES	YES

AMERICAN AIRLINES

B777-300ER								
Economy	3-4-3	31-32"	17.1"	6"	YES 9"	YES	YES	YES
Premium Economy	2-4-2	38"	19"	6"	YES 11"	YES	YES	YES
Business	1-2-1	43"	20.5"	180 degrees	YES 15.4"	YES	YES	YES
First	1-2-1	63"	21.5"	180 degrees	YES 17"	YES	YES	YES
B777-200								
Economy	3-4-3	31-32"	18.1"	6"	YES 9"	YES	YES	YES
Premium Economy	2-4-2	38"	18.5"	6"	YES 11"	YES	YES	YES
Business	1-2-1	43-45"	21.9"	180 degrees	YES 15.4"	YES	YES	YES

ABOVE: British Airways B787-9

The seat will vary depending on the route and aircraft type; route launches may change

BRITISH AIRWAYS

Routes: Heathrow-New York (six-times daily; eight from December; B777); Heathrow-Boston (twice daily; B777/B787-9); Heathrow-Chicago (twice daily; B787-9); Heathrow-Los Angeles (twice daily; B777); Heathrow-San Francisco (twice daily; B777/B787-9); Heathrow-Washington (twice daily; B787-9); Heathrow-Dallas (twice daily; B787-9); Heathrow-Miami (twice daily; B777); Heathrow-Philadelphia (daily; B787-9); Heathrow-Phoenix (daily; B777); Heathrow-Seattle (daily; B787-9); Heathrow-Atlanta (daily; B787-9); Heathrow-Denver (daily; B787-9); Heathrow-Houston (daily; B787-9); Heathrow-Austin (four-times weekly; B787-9); Heathrow-Orlando (daily; B777); Heathrow-Tampa (five-times weekly; B777); Heathrow-San Diego (five-times weekly; B787-9); Heathrow-Las Vegas (daily; B777)
Coming soon: Heathrow-Nashville (weekly from December; B787-9); Heathrow-New Orleans (twice weekly from December; B787-9)
Configuration: B777-300 (185 World Traveller, 44 World Traveller Plus, 56 Club World, 14 First); B777-200 (122 World Traveller, 40 World Traveller Plus, 48 Club World, 14 First); B787-9 (127 World Traveller, 39 World Traveller Plus, 42 Club World, 8 First)

What's included?
World Traveller: IFE with headphones; complimentary meal, drinks and snacks; wifi (for purchase); blanket and pillow
World Traveller Plus: IFE with noise-cancelling headphones; complimentary meal, drinks and snacks; complimentary glass of sparkling wine; wifi (for purchase); amenity kit; cushion and blanket
Club World: fully lie-flat seats (and suite on selected B777-300 flights); complimentary meal, drinks and snacks; complimentary glass of sparkling wine; wifi (for purchase); bedding and amenity kit from The White Company
First: fully lie-flat seats in a private suite; complimentary meal, drinks and snacks; complimentary glass of sparkling wine; loungewear, amenity kit (featuring Elemis toiletries) and slippers from Temperley London →

BRITISH AIRWAYS

Aircraft type and class	Seat layout	Seat pitch	Seat width	Recline	Seatback screen	Audio-Video on demand	Power source	Wifi
B777-300								
World Traveller	3-3-3	31"	17.5"	5"	YES 10"	YES	YES	YES
World Traveller Plus	2-4-2	38"	18.5"	8"	YES 12"	YES	YES	YES
Club World	2-4-2	73" (bed length) 79" (club suite)	20"	Flat in bed mode	YES 12"-18"	YES	YES	YES
First	1-2-1	78" (bed length)	22"	Flat in bed mode	YES 15"-24"	YES	YES	YES
B777-200								
World Traveller	3-3-3	31"	17.5"	5"	YES 9"	YES	YES	YES
World Traveller Plus	2-4-2	38"	18.5"	8"	YES 10"	YES	YES	YES
Club World	2-4-2	72" (bed length)	20"	Flat in bed mode	YES 12.1"	YES	YES	YES
First	1-2-1	80" (bed length)	22"	Flat in bed mode	YES 15.4"	YES	YES	YES
B787-9								
World Traveller	3-3-3	31"	17.5"	5"	YES 9"	YES	YES	YES
World Traveller Plus	2-3-2	38"	18.5"	8"	YES 11"	YES	YES	YES
Club World	2-3-2	73" (bed length)	20"	Flat in bed mode	YES 12"	YES	YES	YES
First	1-2-1	78" (bed length)	22"	Flat in bed mode	YES 15"	YES	YES	YES

How a holiday to Miami and a clash of dates showed one company how they could make their travel budget go further

MY BOSS LAUGHED WHEN I TOLD HIM HOW MUCH WE COULD SAVE. BUT A MONTH LATER HE ADMITTED I WAS RIGHT.

'I'm Michelle Slater, Executive Assistant to the CEO of a company that's well known in the City.

I can't tell you our name because that would reveal the identity of my laughing boss. Let's just say we're big in mergers and acquisitions.

For years I'd booked flights and holidays with DialAFlight and recommended them to lots of friends. But it never crossed my mind they did business travel.

At work, we were using a Business Travel agent and to be fair they gave us a good service. They were expensive. But nobody realised quite how expensive.

Until I discovered how much by accident…

When the penny dropped

You see, I'd booked a holiday to Miami to meet up with two girlfriends. DialAFlight had found me a good deal on Business Class and Kylie, my travel manager, had booked me into the Fontainebleau on Miami Beach for five days.

I was travelling the following week and really looking forward to it.

Suddenly we had to get a team out to Miami to do due diligence in a hurry. The last thing I wanted was to bump into the boys from the office on my holiday. But I called our Business Travel agent and booked 10 seats. That's when the penny dropped.

Their prices were three and a half times higher than I'd paid for my own holiday, which also included a hotel.

Happily we didn't see the guys and had a great time. I later spoke to Kylie. 'Why was there such a big difference in prices? Did DialAFlight do business travel?' I asked.

It turned out they had more than 2000 business clients and £356 million buying power. I never knew. She referred me to a page on their website which explained why they get such good rates.

Did you know, for example, that airlines have up to **25 different fare classes** and not just the four you can name? Neither did I. Very few people have access to them apparently.

I knew from experience that dealing with DialAFlight was easy. And it was reassuring to read comments from some of their existing clients who all seemed enthusiastic.

When I mentioned this to my boss and told him how much we could save, he laughed. But agreed I should give DialAFlight a trial.

A month later he admitted I was right… which believe me, does not happen very often.

Value for money

He's happy because we're saving money and he gets all the reports he needs. I'm happy because I have a switched on travel team who make my life easy.

And I know that we're getting value for money.'

If you'd like us to help save your company money let's chat.

Paula Andrews, Corporate Relations Manager **020·7204·6666**

Michelle's firm is one of 2038 companies which trust us to move their key executives around the world. See comments from more clients overleaf…

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Quite simply, we think 'try before you buy' is the best way to understand how different we are. And we're sure you'll love how we work. Certainly the 2038 SMEs who trust us to move their key executives around the world do.

People like **SET Creative** which designs and organises live events worldwide for companies like Google, Coca Cola and Nike.

Here's what Operations Manager Marcia Redman thinks about working with DialAFlight.

> *'You name it, they can source it and at truly comparable prices. Moving large teams of people to events around the world is not easy, but DialAFlight manage it with no complaints.*
>
> *'Whether long or short haul their attention to detail remains consistent. Nothing is too much trouble or too hard to work around. DialAFlight were nothing short of miracle workers when COVID-19 struck. Absolute legends.'*

Mostly things run smoothly. But sometimes the weather or something else has a different idea. It's only then when you learn what your travel organiser is made of.

Alison Cavener, Senior Personal Executive Assistant at the **Medical Research Network** experienced this at first hand:

> *'We consider DialAFlight to be a strategic business partner and it's not only during core business hours that they have demonstrated their excellence.*
>
> *'I was in Chicago last summer and BA cancelled my return flight the day before departure. I called the 24hr emergency number and was so impressed with the person who dealt with my request. I'd never spoken to him before, but it was as if he knew the Medical Research Network and really did care about our plight.*
>
> *'Flight availability was disappearing before his eyes as all BA travellers were trying to do the same but he was an experienced, safe pair of hands and got us onto a flight!'*

Or, how about someone who knows the travel industry inside out? Keith Betton is a former **Head of Corporate Affairs at ABTA**:

> *'You are the only travel agent I use. And if you Google my name you'll see that I was at ABTA for 20 years - so I know a lot of travel agents. Good service is hard to find, so I am very happy to recognise it.'*

So let me remind you of the reasons to call and talk about your company's business travel:

- ✔ **Expert** travel team available all hours
- ✔ **Good** old fashioned, tailored customer service
- ✔ **Best value** for money. £365 million of buying power
- ✔ **Bespoke** management reporting
- ✔ **All** your travel plans - automatically updated - on the DialAFlight app
- ✔ **24/7** emergency helpline run by our own staff
- ✔ **All** bookings ABTA / ATOL and Client Trust Account protected
- ✔ **No quibble**, no hesitation refunds if Covid wrecks your plans
- ✔ **Air Miles** and loyalty points automatically added to your bookings
- ✔ **Your booking** helps thousands of children learn to read as part of our **Dolly Parton reading scheme**

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Then, if you'd like to take up our offer to try before you buy let's have a chat today and see how we can help make life easier for you.

Obviously, we trust you to be fair. Please don't ask us to book the whole of next year's travel in 30 days. And train tickets are not included.

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ABOVE: Delta A330-300; **RIGHT:** Jetblue Mint suite

DELTA

Route: Heathrow-New York JFK (ten-times weekly; B767-400); Heathrow-Atlanta (daily; A330-300); Heathrow-Detroit (four-times weekly; B767-400); Heathrow-Boston (three-times weekly; B767-400)

Configuration: B767-400 (156 Economy, 28 Comfort Plus, 20 Premium Select, 34 Delta One); A330-300 (203 Economy, 24 Comfort Plus, 21 Premium Select, 34 Delta One)

What's included?

Economy: IFE and headphones; complimentary meal, drinks and snacks; wifi (for purchase); blanket and pillow

Delta Comfort Plus: IFE and headphones; complimentary meal, drinks and snacks; wifi (for purchase); complimentary headset; amenity kit; blanket and pillow

Delta Premium Select: IFE and headphones; complimentary meal, drinks and snacks; wifi (for purchase); Tumi amenity kit; blanket and pillow

Delta One: fully lie-flat seats; IFE and noise-cancelling headphones; complimentary meal, drinks and snacks; wifi (for purchase); Tumi amenity kit; blanket and pillow

JETBLUE

Routes: Heathrow-New York JFK; Gatwick-New York JFK (daily; A321LR)

Configuration: 114 Economy, 24 Mint suites

What's included?

Economy: IFE with earphones; live TV; complimentary meal, soft drinks and snacks; complimentary wifi; amenity kit; blanket

Mint: fully lie-flat seats in suites (or more spacious studios at the bulkhead row) with a sliding privacy door; IFE with noise-isolating headphones; live TV; complimentary meal, drinks and snacks; complimentary wifi; memory foam pillow, customisable blanket and slippers; Tuft and Needle cushion and Wanderfuel amenity kit →

DELTA

Aircraft type and class	Seat layout	Seat pitch	Seat width	Recline	Seatback screen and size	Audio-Video on demand	Power source	Wifi
B767-400								
Economy	2-3-2	31"	18.1"	4"	YES 10.1"	YES	YES	YES
Comfort Plus	2-3-2	34"	18.1"	5"	YES 10.1"	YES	YES	YES
Premium Select	2-2-2	38"	19"	7"	YES 13.3"	YES	YES	YES
Delta One	1-2-1	77" (bed length)	20"	180 degrees	YES 18.5"	YES	YES	YES
A330-300								
Economy	2-4-2	31-33"	18"	4"	YES 9"	YES	YES	YES
Comfort Plus	2-4-2	34"	18"	5"	YES 9"	YES	YES	YES
Premium Select	2-3-2	38"	18.5"	7"	YES 13.3"	YES	YES	YES
Delta One	1-2-1	80" (bed length)	23.3"	180 degrees	YES 15.4"	YES	YES	YES

JETBLUE

A321LR								
Economy	3-3	32-37"	18.6"	3"	YES 10.1"	YES	YES	YES
Mint	1-1	78" (bed length)	21"	Flat in bed mode	YES 17-22"	YES	YES	YES

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VIRGIN ATLANTIC

Route: Heathrow-New York JFK (three-times daily; A350); Heathrow-Orlando (daily; A330-300); Heathrow-Atlanta (daily; A350); Heathrow-San Francisco (daily; B787-9); Heathrow-Boston (daily; B787-9); Heathrow-Miami (daily; B787-9); Heathrow-Los Angeles (daily; B787-9); Heathrow-Las Vegas (daily; B787-9); Manchester-New York JFK (daily; B787-9); Manchester-Orlando (twelve-times weekly; A330-300); Edinburgh-Orlando (twice-weekly; A330-300)

Coming soon: Heathrow-Washington (daily from March); Heathrow-Seattle (daily from March)

Configuration: A350 (235 Economy, 56 Premium, 44 Upper Class)*; A330-300 (185 Economy, 48 Premium, 31 Upper Class); B787-9 (192 Economy, 35 Premium, 31 Upper Class)

What's included?

Economy: IFE with earphones; complimentary meal, drinks and snacks; wifi (for purchase); blanket and pillow

Premium: IFE with premium headphones; complimentary meal, drinks and snacks; wifi (for purchase); welcome glass of Champagne; amenity kit (during night flights)

Upper: fully lie-flat seats; IFE with premium headphones; complimentary meal, drinks and snacks; wifi (for purchase); welcome glass of Champagne; amenity kit; onboard lounge in The Loft/The Booth*

** May change to reconfigured A350 from December*

ABOVE: Virgin Atlantic Upper Class seat; **RIGHT:** United Airlines Polaris Business Class seat

UNITED AIRLINES

Route: Heathrow-New York Newark (twice daily; B767-300); Heathrow-Washington (twice daily; B767-300); Heathrow-Chicago (daily; B767-300); Heathrow-Houston (daily; B787-9); Heathrow-San Francisco (daily; B787-9)

Configuration: B767-300 (99 Economy, 22 Premium Plus, 46 Polaris Business Class); B787-9 (116 Economy, 88 Economy Plus, 48 Polaris Business Class)

What's included?

Economy: IFE and earphones; complimentary meal, drinks and snacks; wifi (for purchase); blanket and pillow

Premium Plus: IFE and noise-reducing headphones; complimentary meal, drinks and snacks; wifi (for purchase); amenity kit; Saks Fifth Avenue blanket and pillow

Polaris: fully lie-flat seats; IFE and noise-reducing headphones; complimentary meal, drinks and snacks; wifi (for purchase); amenity kit; Saks Fifth Avenue blanket and pillow. BT

UNITED AIRLINES

Aircraft type and class	Seat layout	Seat pitch	Seat width	Recline	Seatback screen and size	Audio-Video on demand	Power source	Wifi
B767-300								
Economy	2-3-2	31″	18.5″	4″	YES 9″	YES	YES	YES
Premium Plus	2-2-2	38″	18.5″	6″	YES 13.3″	YES	YES	YES
Polaris Business Class	1-1-1	77″	20.6″	180 degrees	YES 16″	YES	YES	YES
B787-9								
Economy	3-3-3	32″	16.3-17.3″	3″	YES	YES	YES	YES
Economy Plus	3-3-3	35″	17.3″	4″	YES	YES	YES	YES
Polaris Business Class	2-2-2		20.6″	180 degrees	YES	YES	YES	YES

VIRGIN ATLANTIC

A350								
Economy	3-3-3	31-34″	17.4″	5″	YES 11.6″	YES	YES	YES
Premium Economy	2-4-2	38″	18.5″	7″	YES 13.3″	YES	YES	YES
Upper Class	1-2-1	44″	20″	Flat in bed mode	YES 18.5″	YES	YES	YES
A330-300								
Economy	2-4-2	31-34″	17″	6″	YES 9″	YES	YES	YES
Premium Economy	2-3-2	38″	21″	7″	YES 10.5″	YES	YES	YES
Upper Class	1-1-1	33″	22″	Flat in bed mode	YES 11.1″	YES	YES	YES
B787-9								
Economy	3-3-3	31-34″	17″	5″	YES 9″	YES	YES	YES
Premium Economy	2-3-2	38″	21″	8″	YES 11.1″	YES	YES	YES
Upper Class	1-1-1	33″	22″	Flat in bed mode	YES 11.1″	YES	YES	YES

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DIFFERENT BY design

Brands in the serviced apartment and aparthotel sector are using design inspired by location to distinguish their properties, and give guests a sense of community and connection

It's fair to say that until recently the words 'serviced apartment' would not have been enticing ones. At best, most serviced apartments are forgettable: anonymous in design, with no connection to the local area and inoffensive in fixtures and fittings. The thought of weeks spent in such accommodation isn't the sort of treat some would associate with business travel. Then there is that hybrid of apartments and hotels called, rather unimaginatively, aparthotels. It's an ugly neologism, rather like bleisure, but at least then there's the chance of some time off for good behaviour.

Still, there are some brands hoping to change the reality – and our perception – of serviced apartments. "It's a nascent sector still and it's been very corporate in the past," says Stephen McCall, chief executive of Edyn, which has the serviced apartment brands Cove and SACO as well as aparthotel brand, Locke. McCall blames the hospitality industry for being slow to respond because of "the traditional hospitality trope of consistency".

"It's bland, it's transactional, it's dead functional," McCall says. "I wish the travelling public were more aware of the breadth of choice available to them. People think serviced apartments are corporate, white-washed, stain-proof, with indestructible plastic furniture. It's what you get in the US, which has a massive extended-stay market, but it's very boring."

In its place the Edyn brands "...try and get very inspirational designers with keen vision and an incredible aesthetic to give you an experience in your room that's a bit edgier and sharper than you would have at home. And maybe you wouldn't do that at home because you don't upgrade there every ten years."

> 'We try and get very inspirational designers to give you an experience in your room that's a bit edgier'

A FRESH AESTHETIC

This approach, with variations, can be seen in many of the new aparthotels, though there are challenges when a development might have hundreds of units in it.

Kayleigh Millington is group head of interiors for City Suites, which also has the Wilde aparthotels brand. The dilemma, according to Millington, is to "design en masse" while also keeping things "tonal, tasteful, but not going overboard with a particular type of finish or artwork". Millington was clear about what she wanted to change. "My perception of serviced apartments before working in the sector was they were pretty basic."

Instead, Millington's design aesthetic is fresh with quality materials. "A well-engineered timber floor and a carpet that is comfortable underfoot – it won't be a bold, bright print that you might put in a hotel where you are only staying one or two nights. You are going for the design side of things."

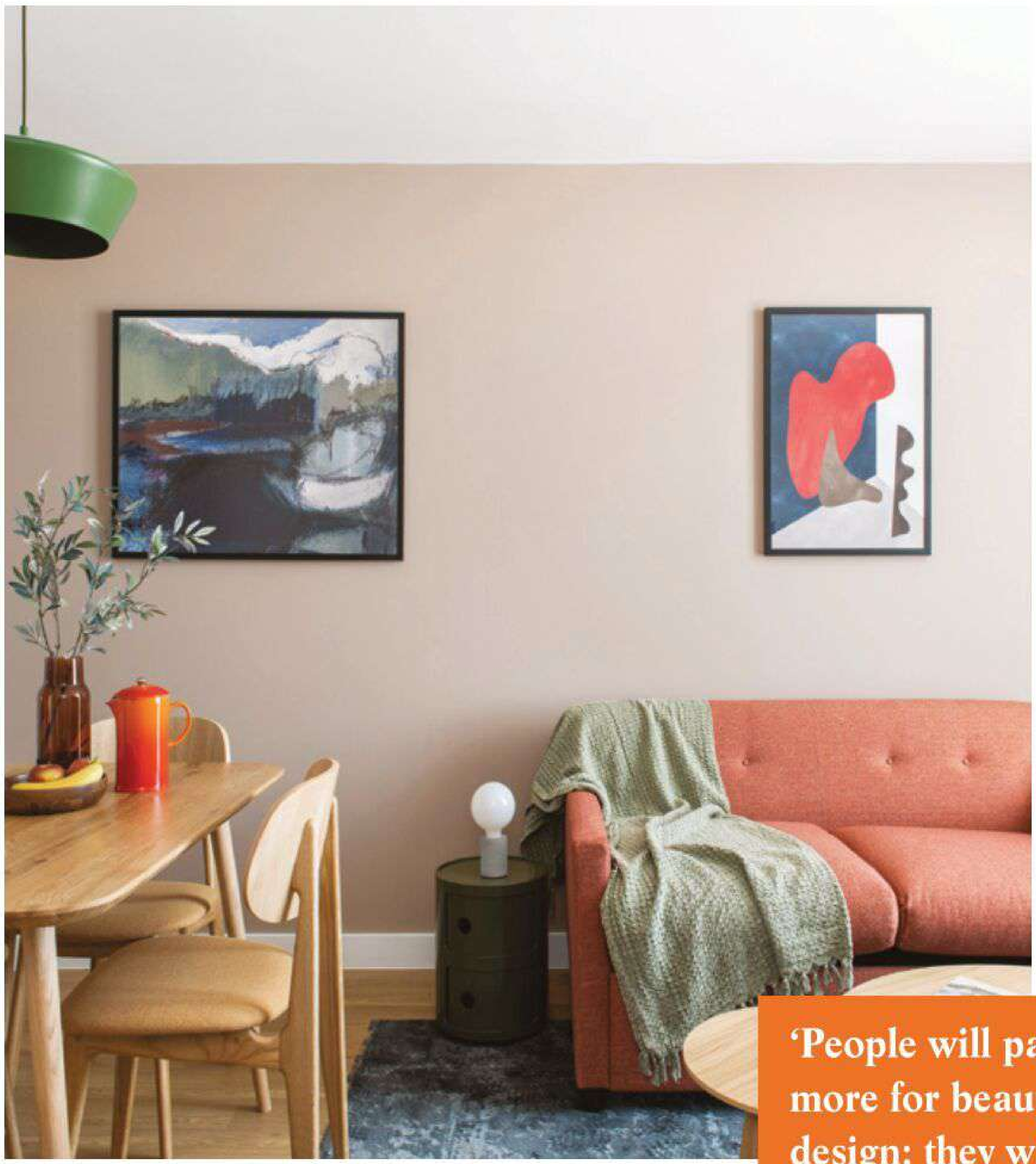
Frédéric Carré is regional general manager for UK, Germany, Spain and Georgia at The Ascott Limited, and is responsible for both serviced apartments and the Citadines aparthotel brand, which is expanding across Europe. Carré →

Lyf in full swing

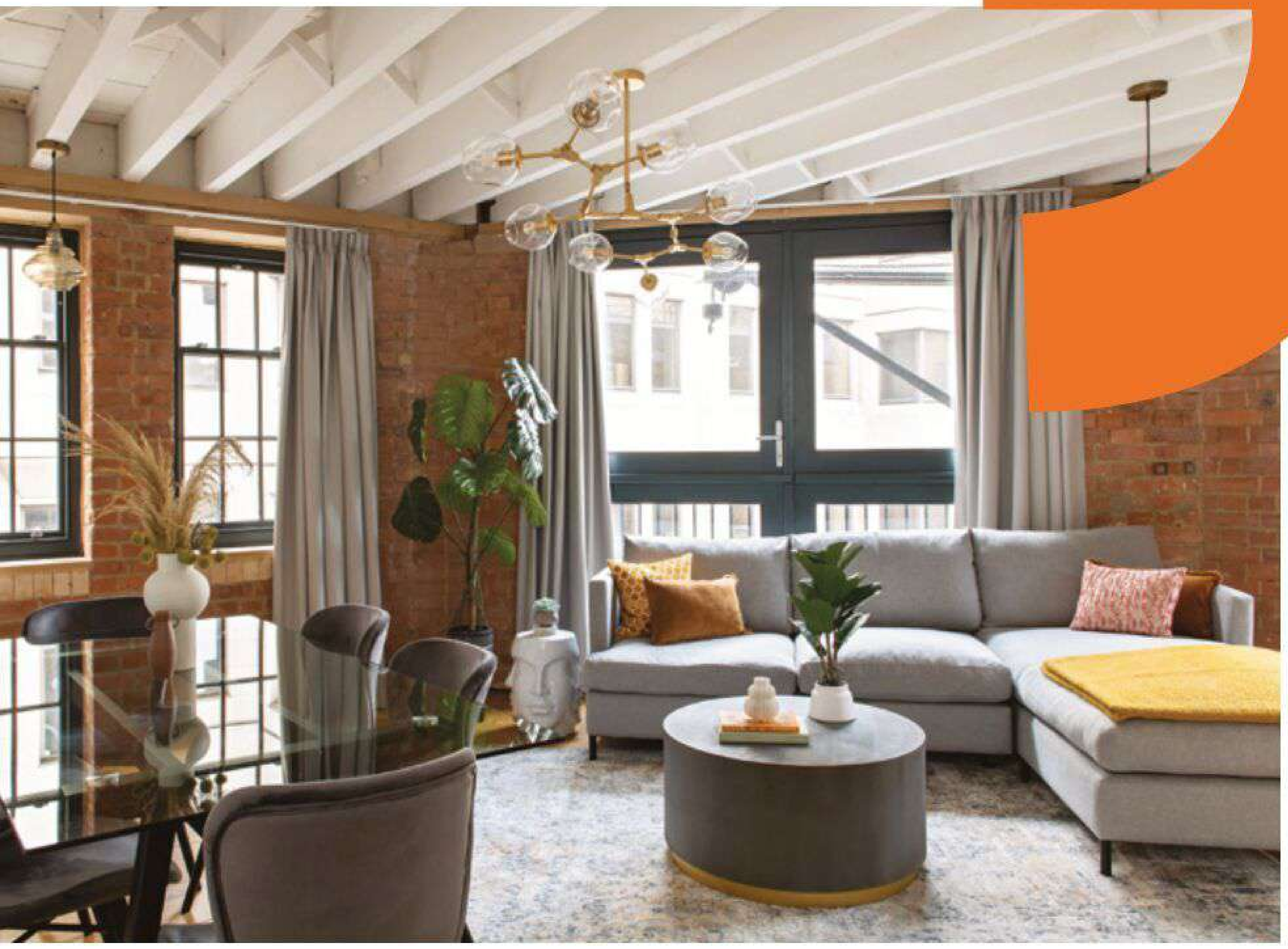
WELCOME
FUKUOKA

LEFT: Lyf Funan Singapore's 'Connect' social zone
ABOVE: The lobby of Lyf Tenjin Fukuoka features wall art by local artist Kazuhiko Ifuku

WORDS TOM OTLEY



ABOVE: Cove Paradise Street, Liverpool
BELOW: Cove Arne Street, Covent Garden



believes the design must give a sense of the local, something Ascott achieves by using both its internal design team and an external team from the location of the new aparthotel.

"This allows the design of the property to both express the DNA of the brand through the input of the internal team, while the local team expresses spirit of the location."

Pointing to the award-winning design for the Citadines in Islington, Carré says that its previous use as a Royal Mail sorting office inspired the team to put a post box in reception and a London skyline in the guest rooms. In the new Citadines property in Nantes, the fact that French novelist Jules Verne was born in the city inspired an 'Around the World in 80 days' theme.

AVOIDING HOMOGENEITY

The basics are important as well. As Millington says, "the design of the apartments means ensuring there is enough storage in the bathrooms, hanging spaces with good-quality hangers with skirt clips and somewhere to put your suitcase. There's also a dining table with a plug nearby so it can be worked at with a laptop and a glass of wine nearby, and rooms with as much natural light as possible, yet at the same time offering black-out curtains in the bedroom and good quality beds so people get the sleep they need."

The challenge for designers – and brands – is how to achieve scale and efficiency without sacrificing the style of a place. Rolling out one design a thousand times is a lot less expensive than individual properties. This is true of hotels, but perhaps we don't notice it so much when we are staying only a couple of nights.

> 'People will pay more for beautiful design; they will be more loyal to the brand and they will book direct'

"Our job is to look for scale and efficiency yet avoid that homogeneity," says Edyn's McCall. "We don't want to replicate things for the sake of our comfort. We don't use the same designer for each of our hotels. We don't just put a picture on the wall and call it design. We work with different designers in each place to give it a unique design. Fifty years ago when you stayed in a hotel it was a serious upgrade on your house, but now many hotel rooms are nowhere as attractive as where we live. We even have faster broadband at home."

This is taking a bet that people want that variety and will pay for it. McCall admits that not everyone does, but then the majority of the market can cater for those happy with cookie-cutter serviced apartments. McCall's business case is that "people will pay more for beautiful design; they will be more loyal to the brand and they will book direct."

"All our serviced hotels and aparthotels look different," he adds. "I don't want to travel to Berlin and have a hotel that is identical to one in London. Where's the fun in that? We have amazing common areas and collaborations with artists, and a community of relationships with people in the area to devise a programme for each property – we've put on in-lobby talks on diversity and inclusion, held calligraphy lessons, hosted DJ nights and mescal tasting."

→

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ABOVE: Studio Deluxe at Citadines Islington
BELOW: A communal space at Citadines Islington

This approach is also being used by Ascott's new coliving brand, Lyf, which is for "next-generation travellers, such as digital nomads, technopreneurs, creatives and self-starters" and uses design to "enliven the spaces and foster a sense of community", according to Norman Cross, head of Lyf brand and general manager of Lyf Singapore.

"Lyf features plenty of flexible communal spaces, such as the coworking areas which can be easily transformed into zones for workshops or social gatherings [and] the units are also customisable to suit the guests' individual needs and preferences," says Cross.

For the social side, Lyf has regular programmes of activities, including workshops with local artisans, hackathons, innovation talks, music jamming sessions, cooking sessions and many more. The guest service managers, rather than being called concierges, are rather punningly termed "Lyf Guards and Ambassadors of Buzz" providing not just guest services but also city and food guides, and bar-keeping at the properties.

To date, Ascott has a total of 17 Lyf properties with more than 3,000 units in 13 cities and nine countries, with 14 more set to open. Lyf Funan Singapore, for instance, worked with local designers to create unique furniture pieces for its 'Connect' social zone including a 'seesaw piper chair', 'rocking piper stool' and 'rocking piper lounger'. The lobby has a work by local artist Justin Lee called 'Celebration of Life' which pays homage to Singapore's past and present. In a similar way, Lyf Tenjin Fukuoka in Japan features wall art by local artist Kazuhiko Ifuku.

'We believe people want great staff who know the local area and can recommend local food and drink'

GOING LOCAL

Also in Asia, Lanson Place is another brand which invites travellers to 'Make yourself at home', yet aims to have a design which 'creates energy'. "Our interiors have to be aesthetically pleasing, functional, user-friendly, enjoyable, safe and maintainable," says a spokesperson. It builds its design on three brand pillars: home comfort, community spirit and the art of hosting. These are demonstrated in practice as staff introduce guests to the local neighbourhood, sharing their enthusiasm for everything from food stalls to specialist shops that otherwise might have gone unnoticed.

"Not everyone wants community and togetherness," says McCall, "But we are betting that people don't want something that looks the same everywhere they go. We believe people also want great staff who know the local area and can recommend local food and drink."

But is this localism really what travellers want? Frédéric Carré is in no doubt. "When I speak to our guests, they are clear that they appreciate the relationships with the local area – the small restaurants nearby, the cinema."

It seems that for serviced apartments and aparthotels the future is not just more design, but more connection. BT

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Daytime high-speed train journeys have become increasingly popular in mainland Europe, but further competition is needed to encourage growth

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WORDS ALEX MCWHIRTER

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ABOVE: A Ouigo ES train traverses a bridge near Barcelona, Spain

Spain has opened its borders to high-speed competition with positive results

France's TGVs ushered in the era of high-speed rail across Europe 40 years ago. Since then the Alstom TGV and its rivals from Germany and Italy have expanded their networks across mainland Europe. In fact, it was faster daytime trains which led to the decline of night trains across Europe, which thankfully now see a revival – see our feature Night trains: Sleeping Giant – in the last issue of *Business Traveller* (or at businesstraveller.com)

The number of travellers using daytime high-speed rail had grown substantially over the past 40 years until the pandemic arrived. Passenger numbers have not yet recovered. As background, almost all high-speed rail, domestic and international, is in the hands of state-owned incumbents, so competition is limited and it is competition that drives rail growth.

This year is the European Year of Rail and one nation, Spain, opened its borders to high-speed competition with positive results. Spain's Renfe must now compete with France's SNCF. It will face further competition in 2022 when Ilsa – a joint venture between Trenitalia (45 per cent share) and Air Nostrum – appears on the scene. Ilsa will be deploying Frecciarossa 1000 trainsets of Trenitalia. One of these is currently in Spain awaiting certification.

This competition represents a bright spot in high-speed rail with new services and lower fares resulting in major traffic growth. Renfe has had to respond with its own Avlo high-speed units and these, combined with SNCF's Ouigo ES trainsets, have grown a market previously monopolised by Renfe's conventional AVE services.

Initial results show the benefits. All Rail (the Alliance of Passenger Rail New Entrants in Europe) says, "The evidence is clear. New long distance passenger rail competition [in Spain] introduced earlier this year between Madrid and Barcelona has already boosted passenger numbers to surpass pre-Covid levels."

Adif (Spain's rail regulator) says that in August 308,991 passengers travelled on the high-speed Madrid-Barcelona route compared to 265,217 in 2019.

The regulator notes that normally in summer there would be fewer passengers using the above line.

Currently all three high-speed services are limited to the busy Madrid-Barcelona route but there are plans for high-speed operators to expand their networks to cover other destinations, such as Alicante, Seville and Valencia.

Ouigo ES launched services last May. It was reported by railway media that in the first three months of service Ouigo ES achieved load factors as high as 95 per cent.

When it comes to international high-speed operations, most are operated either as a joint venture or by a service joint-owned by two or more operators. An example of the former would be the venture between SNCF and Germany's Deutsche Bahn. The latter would include operations such as Thalys, TGV Lyria or Eurostar.

However, competition on one route is expected by the end of this year. →

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Siemens is looking at whether or not to install airline-style premium seating in its first class zones

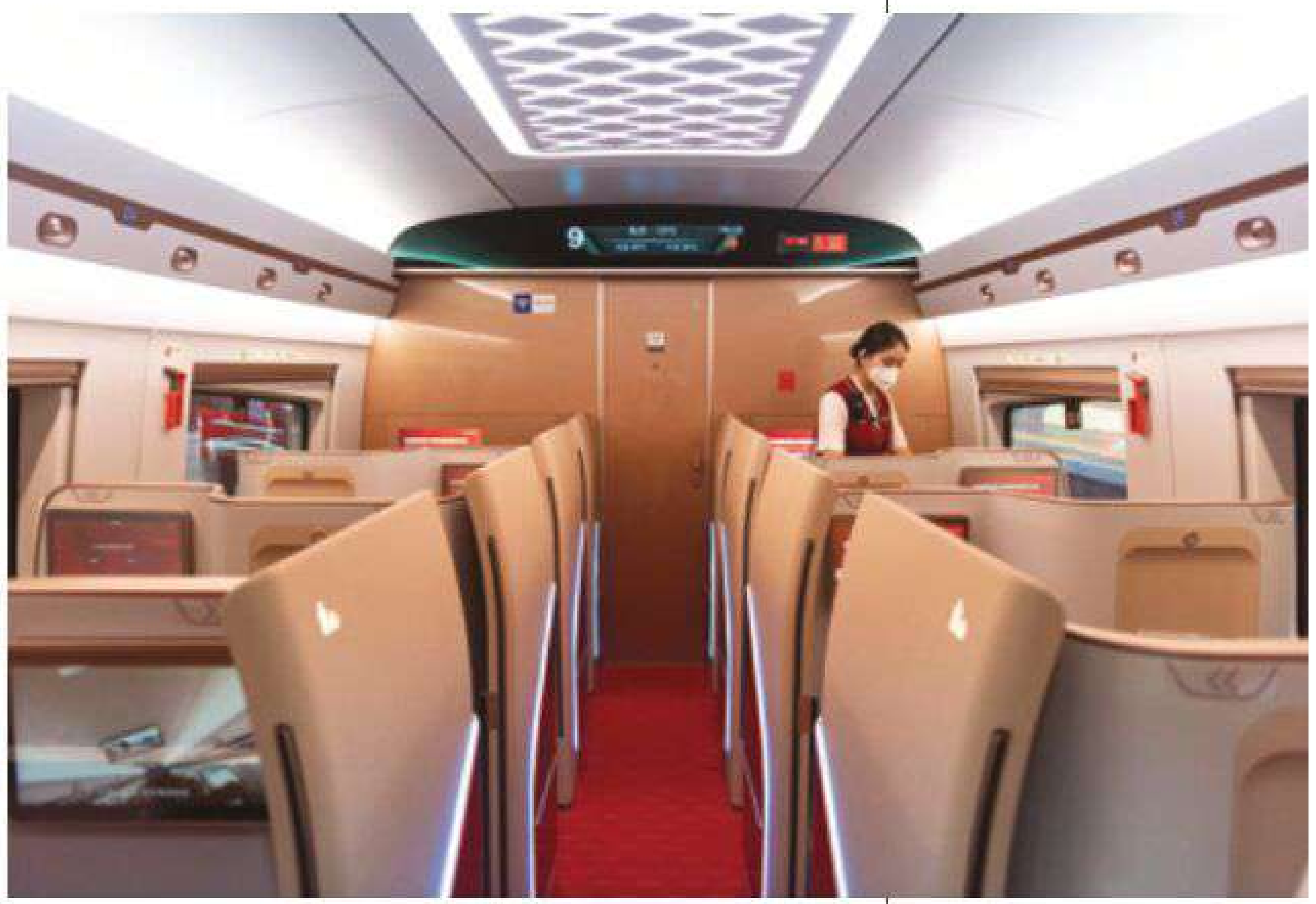
Italy's Trenitalia will compete against SNCF between Paris, Turin and Milan. Initially it will be operating two daily Frecciarossa trains. The service ought to start in December when rail operators change schedules. Trenitalia has been waiting two years for Arafer (France's rail regulator) to grant its approval. SNCF will have to face international competition in terms of prices for the first time. Trenitalia, like its domestic rival Italo, has some of the most comfortable premium cabins on their high-speed trains.

SNCF has announced 'Project Riposte' whereby it will update its TGVs so they can better compete with Trenitalia's Frecciarossa 1000 units. Later SNCF says it may deploy its next generation TGVs (initially referred to as TGV-M) on the route. Managing director of voyages Alain Krakovitch told *La Tribune* that TGV-M will be used as a "weapon" to compete with Italy's Frecciarossa 1000 trains. He added TGV-M will have "a design and services that others will not have".

With more business people and their employers enforcing greener travel policies there is further growth in high-speed rail and this also applies to longer journeys. Unlike air, rail has the room to provide more spacious seating to meet the demands of corporate users.

China shows what can be done. Its new generation of 350 k/h Fuxing trains operating Beijing-Shanghai (journey time 4.5 hrs for 1,300 kms) has airline-style seating which is referred to as business class but could almost pass for an airline's first class seating. The new train's premium seats come with 5G communications and cloud computing.

There is no doubt that high-speed rail is set to expand further. Paris-Milan is a good example. Another would be the high-speed trains operating between the far north and the far south of Italy. Trenitalia wants to order a shorter-in-length version of its Frecciarossa units. These would be deployed between Milan and Palermo using the train ferry across the Straits of Messina.



TOP: A TGV high-speed train; **ABOVE:** business class seats on a new Fuxing high-speed train

It's no surprise Siemens is looking at whether or not to install airline-style premium seating in its first class zones. A Siemens spokesperson told *Business Traveller*, "We are watching this development [fitting airline-style seating] and airline seat suppliers are indeed looking for new markets."

The aim is to make high-speed rail more competitive with air for rail journeys of 2.5 hours as governments seek to decarbonise transport, Siemens Mobility's CEO rolling stock Albrecht Neumann told industry magazine *IRJ*.

Already in France domestic aviation has been banned on similar sectors with the exception of flights operating from the regions to Air France's hub at Paris CDG.

As noted above, SNCF will soon face international high-speed competition.

Whether or not it will face a domestic high-speed rival is a moot point. Not only are high-speed trains costly but they are also complex. Additionally, new trains must be certified and this takes time. That's the issue faced by high-speed newcomer Le Train, which wishes to operate high-speed rail in south-west France. It wants to acquire used TGVs from SNCF to operate this route. However, as EU transport expert Jon Worth noted in a tweet, "A new company 'Le Train' wants to run Arcachon-La Rochelle services. The problem? It can't get any trains for the service… because SNCF is scrapping its old ones [TGVs] instead of re-selling them. The solution? EU should put blanket ban on scrapping."

Regular readers will remember a similar scenario at Eurostar where almost all its original Alstom units were scrapped thus preventing competition as only specific trains may transit the Channel Tunnel.

When the pandemic finally comes to an end we shall see daytime high-speed rail begin its revival. BT

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The Seychelles Islands... a must-visit destination in 2022

Since that distant time when Seychelles' 115 granite and coral islands became scattered over a secluded corner of the Indian Ocean, they have remained sanctuaries for some of the rarest species of flora and fauna on earth. They have a climate where the temperature is always somewhere between 24 and 33 degrees Celsius, earning the islands a reputation as 'land of perpetual summer'. Here are the reasons why the tropical islands should be your next travel destination.

1. Nature

From the smallest frog to the heaviest land tortoise and the only flightless bird of the Indian Ocean, Seychelles boasts an amazing array of endemic and indigenous species waiting to be discovered along its several nature trails. Through careful supervision from the Seychellois, the islands remain one of nature's last pristine sanctuaries and an exciting destination for naturalists, ornithologists and eco-tourists alike with unique specimens such as the jellyfish tree, the Coco-de-mer; the Seychelles Paradise Flycatcher, and numerous species and subspecies of bird life. The Vallée de Mai and legendary Aldabra, the world's largest raised coral atoll, are both UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

2. Beaches

The powder-soft beaches of the Seychelles are often rated among the most beautiful on the planet. In an island archipelago of 115 islands, there is a beach for every occasion. Every island has its own signature shores, ranging from the more popular beaches filled with life to the most secluded romantic nooks.

3. Activities

It's the perfect place to do everything or absolutely nothing. You can relax to the soothing rhythms of nature or choose an energetic, sports-oriented holiday. Diving, sailing, fishing, hiking, island-hopping or ecotourism are all available, or a wide choice of spa treatments to recharge your batteries and liberate your mind.

4. Culture

The Seychellois culture is characterized by the diversity of people who have settled there over the years. Visitors will find a vibrant culture that is the product of over two centuries of intermingling and exchange, a mix of African, European and Asian influences that is reflected in the country's music, dance, culture and architecture and in its cuisine, with spices such as chili, turmeric and ginger.

Perhaps the most enduring attraction of the Seychelles is the security it offers. Here, cocooned within the reassuring atmosphere of a large family, there is still 'time to enjoy' the finer things of life and appreciate the elements of a truly refreshing Creole culture and enviable island lifestyle. **Tourism Seychelles; UKSTO@Seychelles.com; seychelles.com**

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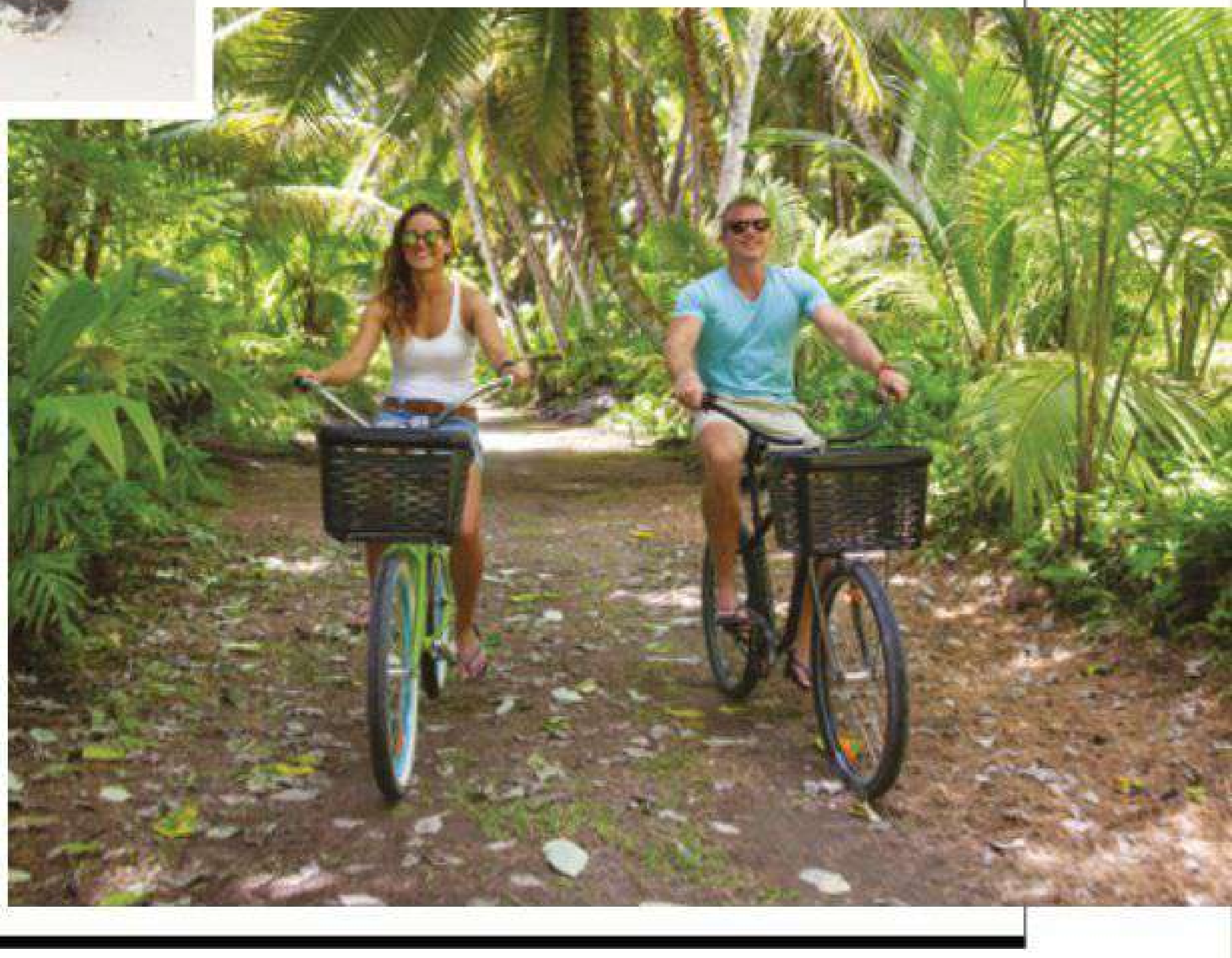

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Our pick of golf and skiing resorts across Europe this winter
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ACTIVE recreation

Take a break in Europe at these upmarket resorts offering the best in golf and skiing

GOLF IN EUROPE

COSTA NAVARINO, GREECE

Best for: Family activity break
The golf: Located in Messinia in the south-west Peloponnese, Costa Navarino has two signature golf courses. The Dunes Course, designed by former US Masters Champion Bernhard Langer, in association with European Golf Design, takes its name from the large dunes that separate several holes from the beach. The Bay Course, designed by golf course architect firm Robert Trent Jones II, has sea and mountain views, and two holes are played alongside the historic Bay of Navarino.
Other attractions: The 4,000 sqm Anazoe spa and thalassotherapy centre, a conference centre – the House of Events, facilities for children, and a variety of restaurants, sports, outdoor and cultural activities.
Stay: As with many of these resorts, you can rent or buy the Navarino Residences (villas), or The Residences at The Westin Resort Costa Navarino, which are fully furnished resort apartments. It is also home to two five-star deluxe hotels, The Romanos, a Luxury Collection Resort (the-luxury-collection.marriott.com) and The Westin Resort Costa Navarino (westin.marriott.com). Next year, two new hotels will open along with two new golf courses designed by two-time Masters champion Jose Maria Olazabal, all at the adjacent Navarino Hills making four golf courses and four five-star hotels within a radius of 13km.
costanavarino.com

QUINTA DO LAGO, PORTUGAL

Best for: Sporting holiday
The golf: Quinta do Lago in the Algarve has three courses: the South Course, which just reopened after a £5.9 million renovation, with its backdrop of the Ria Formosa Natural Park; the North Course, which has a new layout focusing less on length than precision and strategy, with accuracy and course management key factors, and lastly, the Laranjal course, designed by Jorge Santana da Silva, is situated in an orange grove, with fairways sown with Bermuda grass.
Other attractions: As well as tennis, a fitness centre and spa, there is golf tuition at the Paul McGinley Golf Academy and southern Europe's only Taylormade Performance Centre, which helps select the perfect clubs and irons for each golfer.
Stay: Accommodation is either an apartment or villa rental, of which there is a huge range, or staying at the

CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT: Costa Navarino, Greece; Quinta do Largo, Portugal; Hotel Camiral at PGA Catalunya, Spain; A golf course at PGA Catalunya

boutique and unique Magnolia hotel (themagnoliahotelqdl.com) which pays homage to iconic 1950s motor-hotels and brings a taste of Palm Springs to the Algarve. *quintadolago.com*

PGA CATALUNYA, SPAIN

Best for: Natural surroundings
The golf: PGA Catalunya Golf and Wellness is in Catalonia, a short drive from the beaches of the Costa Brava and set in mature forests about 20 minutes' drive from Girona. The 300-hectare site was first conceived as a location for a future F1 track but instead two golf courses by Angel Gallardo and Neil Coles were created: the spectacular Stadium Course and the slightly less forbidding Tour Course. Both are surrounded by villas and apartments built in modernist style – clean white lines and lots of glass, a brand playbook developers follow even down to the type of gardens to be planted. (You can read a full review in our piece from 2017 – Homage to Catalunya – available to subscribers at businesstraveller.com.)
Other attractions: The resort has a Golf Hub for tuition. A new wellness centre opened this year.
Stay: The resort now has two hotels – Hotel Camiral and the Lavida Hotel – as well as the possibility of holiday rentals. *pgacatalunya.com*

→

CHRIS TUBBS PHOTOGRAPHY; AIDAN BRADLEY

LE TOUQUET GOLF RESORT, FRANCE

Best for: Golf aficionados

The golf: Le Touquet Golf Resort in northern France, about one hour's drive from Calais, has a long history of welcoming visitors. Opened in 1904, the golf course was designed by architects Horace Hutchinson and Nick Lane Jackson, and inaugurated by British prime minister Lord Balfour, an enthusiastic golfer. It now has three courses in a forest and dune landscape: La Mer (18 holes), voted the first Links of France, La Forêt (18 holes) and Le Manoir (9 holes).

Other attractions: The seaside resort of Le Touquet-Paris-Plage is close by with its Anglo-Norman architectural heritage and beautiful 1920s buildings, as well as the stunning La Canche Bay nature reserve.

Stay: Accommodation is in the boutique, 41 bedroom Le Manoir Hotel. *letouquetgolfresort.com*

VERDURA RESORT, SICILY

Best for: Beach and golf combined

The golf: The Rocco Forte Verdura Resort in Sicily has three championship golf courses set in a 230-hectare park (two 18-hole courses and a 9-hole course, all designed by internationally renowned firm Kyle Phillips). The East Course was redesigned and reopened last month. It has a new ninth hole, which has water on the left and right, for the opening shot, and an undulating green guarded by two bunkers, water at the front and a backdrop of the beach at the back of the green. The West Course has challenging greens and a front nine winding its way up through the estate, while the back nine makes its way down to the Mediterranean with some exceptional views of the sea.

Other attractions: A 4,000 sqm convention centre. six clay tennis courts, a 60m infinity pool, a football pitch, a gym offering a full programme of activities, as well as jogging paths winding through olive and citrus groves, and a 1.8km stretch of private coast. The 4,000 sqm Verdura Spa has four thalassotherapy pools, two saunas and a hammam.

Stay: The hotel has 203 rooms and suites, and the resort also offers 20 new private villas. *roccofortehotels.com/hotels-and-resorts/verdura-resort*

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TOP: Verdura Resort, Sicily; **ABOVE:** Le Touquet Golf Resort, France

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ABOVE LEFT: St Moritz, Switzerland; ABOVE RIGHT: Chamonix, France

MORGANE RAYLAT; ENGADIN ST MORITZ TOURISMUS

SKIING IN EUROPE

ST MORITZ, SWITZERLAND

Best for: An A-lister experience
The skiing: This spa town located in the Upper Engadine is regarded as the oldest winter holiday resort in the world, and perhaps most exclusive. It dates back to 1864 when hotelier Johannes Badrutt promised four English guests that there would be sunny spells in mid-winter – the area is reputed to have 322 days of sunshine per year. Now, 154 years on, the resort has hosted the Winter Olympics twice and welcomed stars, including Coco Chanel, Jacques Cartier and Charlie Chaplin. While you could stick to the award-winning restaurants and extensive spa facilities, the resort offers plenty of skiing options with 360km of pistes and 87 runs. Getting here is also part of the charm, with the Glacier Express and Bernina Express travelling along a UNESCO World Heritage railway line.
Other attractions: Race down a bobsleigh track at 130 km/h at the St Moritz-Celerina Olympia bob run, or shop till you drop in the designer boutiques. Also check out the frozen lake, which hosts various activities, including the White Turf equestrian festival in February, one of Switzerland's most prestigious events.
Stay: Visitors can be found sipping Champagne at the resort's grand luxury hotels, which include the Kulm Hotel, the ski-in/ski-out Suvretta House, the glamorous Badrutt's Palace (Europe's first ever Palace Hotel) and the smaller (but no less luxurious) Carlton Hotel St Moritz.
Ski pass: There's a flexible ten-day pass for the entire Engadine snow sports region, while select hotels offer passes as part of a stay package. *stmoritz.com*

CHAMONIX, FRANCE

Best for: Adrenaline junkies
The skiing: Located at the foot of the imposing Mont-Blanc at 4,807m, and home to the first Winter Olympics in 1924, it should come as no surprise that the resort is better suited to the pros. The valley of Chamonix lies in the Haute-Savoie region of France, bordered by Switzerland and Italy, and boasts over 150km of pistes and 115 runs across the five areas of Vallorcine, Les Houches, Servoz, Argentière and Chamonix-Mont-Blanc. Brave souls may want to challenge themselves to the world-famous The Vallée Blanche, an off-piste glacier with a 23km descent down to the town from the 3,842m Aiguille du Midi. This year marks the 200th anniversary of the Compagnie des Guides de Chamonix – professional guides who lead climbing expeditions.
Other attractions: Step into the Void, a glass box suspended 1,000m at the Aiguille du Midi, or visit the Mer de Glace glacier on the northern slopes of the Mont Blanc massif. Alternatively, heal aches and pains at the 4,000 sqm QC Terme spa, or go shopping in the charming Alpine village.
Stay: The five-star Relais and Chateaux hamlet-style hotel Hameau Albert 1er has been a favourite since 1903, with a spa facing Mont Blanc and a Michelin-starred restaurant, or try the party-friendly ski-in/ski-out La Folie Douce.
Ski pass: The Mont Blanc Unlimited lift pass provides access to the resort, as well as slopes in St Gervais, Megève and Courmayeur. *en.chamonix.com*

CORTINA D'AMPEZZO, ITALY

Best for: An Olympic heritage
The skiing: The 'Queen of the Dolomites' in the northern Italian province of Belluno, just two hours from Venice, welcomes skiers of various levels with its 120km of pistes and 83 runs. Its rich racing history includes hosting the 1956 Winter Olympics and most recently the 2021 Alpine

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Ski World Championships, and the Olympic flame will return to the 1,000-year-old town in 2026. The picturesque resort is also part of the Dolomites UNESCO World Heritage Site, and skiers can take part in cross-country tours through the Ampezzo Dolomites Nature Reserve, while Bond fans can spot locations used in the film *For Your Eyes Only*.

Other attractions: Activities include snowkiting (yes, surfing on snow with skis), and ice skating or curling in the Olympic Ice Stadium. Alternatively, guests can retreat to the Rifugio Lagazuoi sauna at 2,700m above sea level, or have a very interesting history lesson in the town's involvement in the First World War at The Great War Open Air Museum.

Stay: Cortina is home to more than 50 hotels, which include the five-star Cristallo, A Luxury Collection Resort and Spa, which celebrated its 120th anniversary this year, and The Grand Hotel Savoia, A Radisson Collection hotel. It also has three luxury chalets – the ten-room Chalet Serge Dolomiti Lodge Alverà, and the LV01 Dolce Vita and LV02 Perla (both of which sleep 12 people) – and a selection of mountain lodges such as the Rifugio Lagazuoi at 2,752 metres.

Ski pass: The Dolomiti Superski pass gives access to 1,200 km of slopes including the neighbouring valleys. *dolomiti.org/en/cortina*

BAQUEIRA BERET, SPAIN

Best for: Family-friendly skiing

The skiing: Spain's largest ski resort lies in the Aran Valley in the Lleida province of the Pyrenees, and is formed of four zones: Baqueira, Beret, Bonaigua, Baciver. It's great for a variety of levels, featuring 167km of pistes and 111 slopes. It's great for a variety of levels, with pros able to tackle the challenging pistes in Baqueira while beginners can feel at ease in the more laid-back Beret – plus it has four snowparks for children.

Other attractions: Visitors can learn to make artisan cheese, practise tai chi in the clouds, or discover the valley's 30 Romanesque churches. Après-ski comes in the form of tapas bars in the valley.

Stay: At the foot of the slopes lie the five-star properties Hotel Val de Neu, Hotel AC Baqueira Ski Resort, Autograph Collection, and Rafaelhoteles by La Pleta, all of which include spas and are metres from the chairlift. Bigger groups can rent rustic houses or apartments in the valleys.

Ski pass: The Baqueira pass can be topped up either by the day or for the whole season, allowing you to bypass the ski lifts.
baqueira.es

TOP LEFT: Cortina D'Ampezzo, Italy
TOP RIGHT: St Anton, Austria
ABOVE: Baqueira Beret, Spain

FRANZ PERINI/DOLOMITI SUPERSKI

ST ANTON, AUSTRIA

Best for: Après-ski revellers

The skiing: The Tyrolean mountain village resort of St Anton is Austria's largest inter-linked ski area, covering 50 square km and encompassing the villages of St Anton am Arlberg, St Christoph, Stuben, Lech, Zurs, Warth and Schrocken. It's considered the birthplace of modern skiing thanks to the pioneering technique developed by Hannes Schneider in 1907. Visitors can find out more about the town's history on the 85-km-long Run of Fame ski circuit which features signposts honouring local skiing legends. The resort offers 305km of ski runs and is designed for more advanced skiers with 200km of off-piste trails. It's an après-ski paradise, with DJ sets and steins at the Mooserwirt, a lively bar on the slopes. Alternatively, enjoy award-winning cuisine at the Verwallstube mountain restaurant in Galzig.

Other attractions: Activities include snowboard parks, husky sleigh rides, 80km of winter walking trails, plus there's wellness facilities at the Arlberg WellCom centre.

Stay: In town, there's the family-owned five-star Raffl's St Antoner Hof, or stay on the slopes at the 17-room ski-in/ski-out Mooser Hotel next door to the party destination.

Ski pass: The Ski Arlberg Pass can be used for the various skiing regions.
stantonamarlberg.com/en/home BT

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10 burning questions about electric cars

Whether you like them or loathe them, electric cars are coming. Here are the answers to the questions you've always wanted to ask about electric vehicles and hybrids

WORDS NAT BARNES

1 WILL ALL NEW CARS BE FULLY-ELECTRIC AFTER 2030?

No. The UK Government has announced that it will be a staggered introduction. So from 2030, all new cars need to be *electrified* not fully-electric, meaning plug-in hybrids (PHEVs) will still be sold. Then from 2035, all new cars will need to be fully electric or EVs. In reality, most car manufacturers have already announced that their line-ups will be electrified ahead of these dates.

2 SHOULD I BUY A FULLY-ELECTRIC CAR OR A PLUG-IN HYBRID?

From 2035 you won't have a choice, but before then it depends on how you use your car. The fully-charged range of electric cars is growing all the time (see next question) and many owners find that the technology isn't the hindrance that you might at first imagine. However, if you want the flexibility of being able to drive long journeys at short notice or you run up a high annual mileage, then a plug-in hybrid (PHEV) might be more convenient.

3 WHAT ABOUT THEIR RANGE? HOW FAR CAN ELECTRIC CARS GO ON ONE CHARGE?

Battery technology is improving all the time, but the range of electric vehicles largely depends on the size of the battery fitted. Most new electric cars have a fully-charged range of 200 to 300 miles, while the new Mercedes EQS (the new S-Class) has a range of up to 453 miles. The main problem is the time it takes to fully charge.

4

IS IT SAFE TO BUY A USED ELECTRIC CAR?

Well, once you accept the usual used car-buying warnings of 'caveat emptor', yes it is. All EV car manufacturers have separate warranties for their batteries (on Jaguar's I-Pace for instance it's eight years and 100,000 miles) and if you're in any doubt, you can often check the health of the battery pack using the car's on-board diagnostics.

5

IS AN ELECTRIC CAR CHEAPER TO BUY AND RUN THAN A PETROL OR DIESEL CAR?

At present, electric cars are generally more expensive to buy than their conventional counterparts with petrol or diesel engines. However, the running costs are considerably lower and you pay less in road tax and any taxes you might have as a company car driver, so over a period of two or three years they're usually cheaper overall.

6

IS AN ELECTRIC CAR REALLY BETTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT THAN A NORMAL CAR?

Oh crikey, how long have you got? Strictly speaking, yes running a car on electricity is cleaner than pumping out carbon dioxide and other particulates into our immediate atmosphere as with petrol or diesel.

Dig a bit deeper though and it's not that simple. That electricity you use to charge up your electric car needs to be from green sources itself, while the car batteries manufacture includes lithium, cobalt and nickel, which are all about as clean as a Victorian street urchin. Battery technology is improving as is the reliance on rare metals, but the reality is that it's not clear cut and both sides of the argument can unravel faster than snagging your favourite Christmas jumper on a holly bush.

7

WILL THERE BE A SUFFICIENT NUMBER OF CHARGERS FOR ME TO CHARGE MY CAR?

There are more than 16,000 charging locations and around 45,000 chargers in the UK. The initial problems of the charging network are being ironed out with more providers able to take contactless or immediate payments rather than requiring you to have an account. Companies such as Gridserve are also building ultra-rapid, fast-charging service stations. Gridserve has bought a national charging network from Ecotricity, so is updating the motorway charging network, too. How much you will need that network however is another matter. At present, around 80 per cent of EV drivers charge their cars at home or at work, so you may need it less than you think.

8

HOW WILL I CHARGE MY CAR IF I DON'T HAVE OFF-STREET PARKING?

The government has just put in a proposal that all new homes and offices built from 2022 will have EV chargers, so this will become less of a problem as time goes on. As stated above, the charging network is growing all the time and local councils are installing more kerbside charging points in lampposts to help. Otherwise, there are concierge services, such as the start-up firm Zumocharge in London, which will collect your car, charge it up overnight and return it to you for a small fee plus the cost of electricity.

9

HOW MUCH DOES IT COST TO CHARGE AN ELECTRIC CAR?

Here's the good news – at a traditional filling station, you're effectively at the mercy of the fuel company. With an EV though, you can change your home electricity provider for the best deal – some providers even offer overnight deals as low as 5p per kWh. As a very general rule, most EVs will travel around three to four miles per kWh.

On the road, charging prices work much like petrol or diesel. Motorway services and faster charging points tend to be expensive, while quieter, less powerful ones are cheaper. Rates can vary from 20p per kWh up to 70p per kWh. You can sometimes get reduced rates however by paying a separate monthly membership fee if you're going to charge regularly with one provider.

10

WHAT ARE THE TAX ADVANTAGES OF AN ELECTRIC CAR EITHER AS AN EMPLOYEE OR BUSINESS OWNER?

As an employee, there are numerous advantages to driving a fully electric company car or even a plug-in hybrid with the Benefit-in Kind tax rates. For plug-in hybrids however, you should check the electric range beforehand as the tax breaks change depending on how far they can go on battery power alone.

The Workplace Charging Scheme helps businesses with the costs and installation of charging points – up to £350 per socket for businesses with off-street parking. For SMEs, the capital allowance tax relief on an EV with low emissions is considerably better than for conventional cars, so speak to your accountant to make it work for you. →

5 EV and PHEVs to watch

HYUNDAI IONIQ 5

Price: from £36,995

Hyundai and sister firm Kia are both building some of the most exciting electrified models to arrive into showrooms and this Ioniq 5 is the perfect example. Stunning, futuristic looks, up to a 298-mile range and incredible performance (how does 0 to 60mph in 5.2 seconds grab you?). The Ioniq 5 may not be one of the most involving cars to drive, but we think it could easily be a contender for the best design in the World Car of the Year awards.

PEUGEOT 308 HYBRID

Price: from £33,000

Driver choice is everything when it comes to buying a new car. An incredible 70 per cent of new Peugeot 308s that leave showrooms are sold as company cars and this latest version is better than ever. As well as traditional petrol and diesel engines, there are two plug-in hybrid models available with a fully-electric version coming in 2023. So the same car will be available as a family hatchback or estate and with four different power sources.

→

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VOLVO XC60 RECHARGE PLUG-IN HYBRID

Price: from £53,075

The XC60 has been Volvo's best-selling model globally since 2009 and this refreshed model is no less desirable. Three plug-in hybrid models are on offer starting with the 340bhp T6 offering emissions as low as 55g/km and an all-electric range of up to 32g/km. In early 2022, the XC60 will also get a larger and more efficient battery pack, improving those performance numbers still further.

AUDI Q4 E-TRON

Price: £40,035

The all-electric Audi Q4 e-tron and Q4 e-tron Sportback are on the same platform as VW's ID4 and the Skoda Enyaq. That means there's a choice of two batteries – 52kwh or 77kWh – and three power levels along with two or four-wheel drive. The Audi Q4 e-tron goes as far as 317 miles (Q4 e-tron Sportback, 323 miles), while it also has intelligent regenerative braking that cleverly automatically uses its knowledge of the road ahead for ultimate driving efficiency.

KIA KV6

Price: from £40,945

While under the skin the gorgeous new Kia KV6 may share some of its underpinnings with the Hyundai Ioniq 5, that's where the similarities end. The KV6 is only available with a 77kWh battery pack, giving it a range of up to 316 miles, but there are two and four-wheel drive models and a more powerful version is on its way, too. We also can't help thinking there's more than a hint of Aston Martin DBX about the rear-end styling and what's not to like about that? BT

To read more, visit evs-unplugged.com

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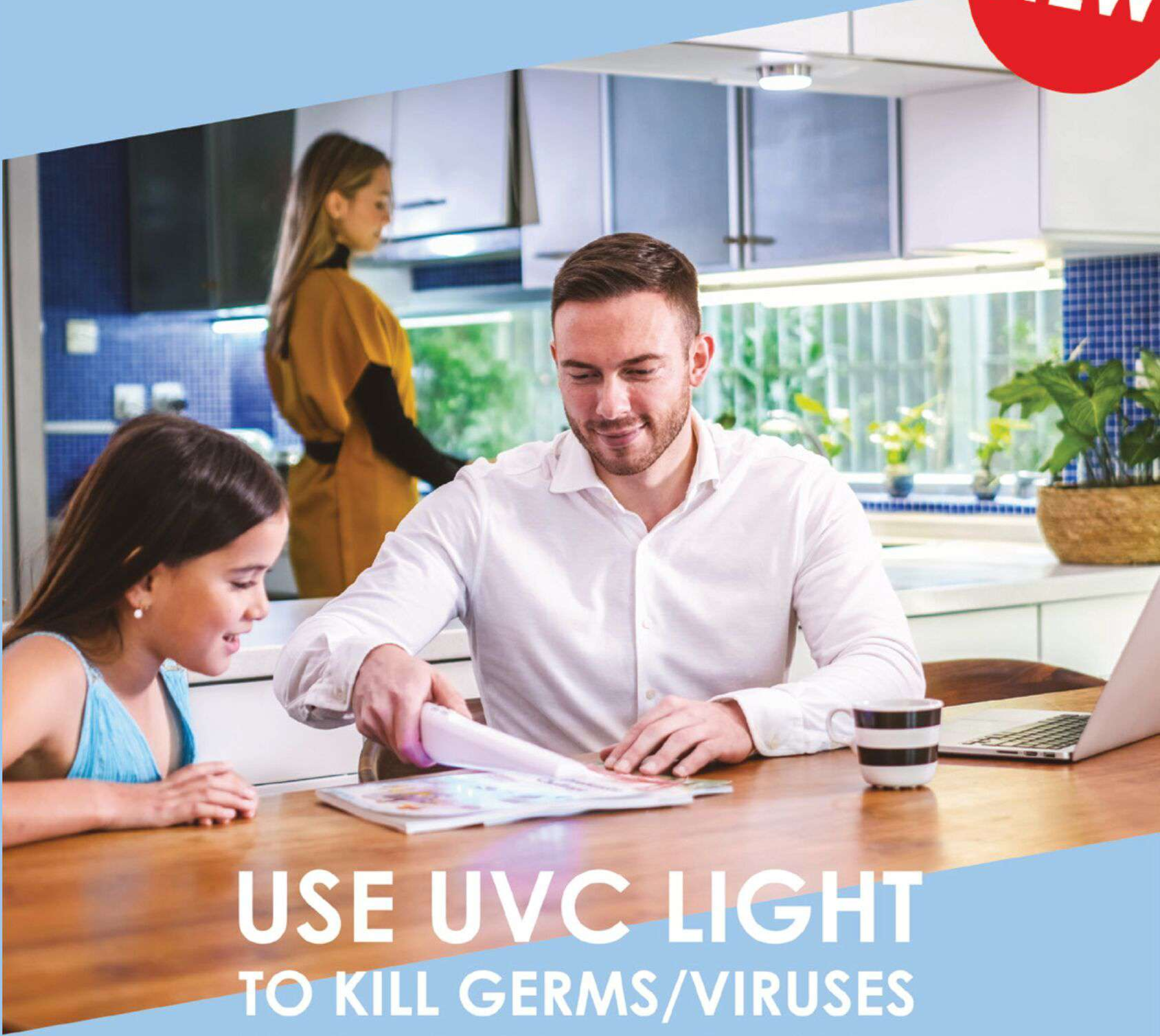

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21ST CENTURY TECHNOLOGY

WORDS HANNAH BRANDLER

Hammersmith

Meander through the streets of one of London's most scenic areas with its historic bridge, gardens, pubs and cafés

1 HAMMERSMITH BRIDGE

The striking 134-year-old green-painted suspension bridge is a landmark known to many in London, linking Hammersmith on the north side of the Thames with the leafy, suburban-like Barnes neighbourhood on the south side. The Grade-II listed structure made headlines across the world when it was abruptly closed in August 2020. It has had its fair share of issues since its debut in 1887, but after decades of unchecked corrosion it was feared it may collapse.

Thankfully this masterpiece of Victorian engineering, designed by Joseph Bazalgette, is now open to pedestrians and cyclists (and rowers beneath), although plans to reopen it to motorised traffic seem far off. This year the government announced a plan to stablise and restore the bridge. Meanwhile, walkers can enjoy its traffic-free beauty.

2 RIVERSIDE STUDIOS

This popular arts centre located on the Thames Path (just right of the bridge) is one of the neighbourhood's best spots for entertainment.

Originally a Victorian iron foundry, it was converted into a film studio in 1933 and later taken over by the BBC from 1954 until 1975, providing a set for early episodes of *Doctor Who*.

Since then, it has been under the management of a charitable trust which provides a diverse programme of events that has featured stars including Benjamin Zephaniah, Helen Mirren and Lenny Henry.

The centre reopened in 2019 following an extensive five-year refurbishment and now comprises two cinemas, state-of-the-art studios for theatre, dance, comedy, art and TV productions, and a riverside bar, kitchen and bakery.
riversidestudios.co.uk

3 THE DOVE

Walk along Lower Mall past various riverside pubs; a stretch packed to the brim during the annual boat race between Cambridge and Oxford universities. You will soon reach Furnivall Gardens and a cobbled alley which connects to Upper Mall. Here you'll find the historic pub The Dove – a favourite among locals. There has been a pub on the site since the 17th century, frequented by historic figures, including King Charles II and poet James Thomson who composed his song *Rule Britannia* here.

A framed list of patrons, including 21st century luminaries, hangs over the lower bar's fireplace. Nab a table on its riverside terrace and duck under low beams to order pints. The pub also offers a full menu of signature dishes by chef Francis Crane crafted from local, seasonal produce.
dovehammersmith.co.uk

THE DOVE
THE DOVE

4 ST PETER'S SQUARE

Continue down the Upper Mall for seven minutes, passing by various rowing clubs, until you reach South Black Lion Lane. Take the underpass beneath the A4 to North Verbena Garden and turn left to reach the picturesque St Peter's Square.

This beautiful green space was laid out in the 1820s and, unlike most garden squares of this kind across London, it's open to the public. Here you'll find the bronze statue The Greek Runner by Sir William Blake at its centre, but the Grade-II listed stuccoed townhouses that surround the garden square are just as interesting.

Check out number 22, an architect's studio that was once the headquarters of major record label Island Records and where musicians, including Cat Stevens, Bob Marley and U2, recorded. The square's grandeur has lent itself to movie sets, with the 2006 biopic *Miss Potter* filmed here.

5 THE ELDER PRESS CAFÉ

Return to South Black Lion Lane and stop for a bite to eat at The Elder Press Café, a lovely minimalist eatery with pastel-pink seating areas, an open kitchen, and a cosy garden courtyard. Its seasonally changing menu features dishes for breakfast, brunch and lunch, and its freshly baked cakes are recommended. The café draws inspiration from the area's printing history (hence the name), and you can find out more about this heritage by walking along Hammersmith Terrace afterwards – a former hotspot of the Arts and Crafts movement. Blue plaques honour past residents and you can visit the home of typographer Emery Walker at number 7.

theelderpress.co.uk; emerywalker.org.uk

CATHERINE GRATWICKE

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the Report

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TRIED AND TESTED
Hyatt Centric Ginza Tokyo 79

Singapore Airlines B777-300ER Business Class (VTL flight)

FRANKFURT-SINGAPORE

FIRST VTL FLIGHT • GERMANY - SIN PORE • SQ32

SINGAPORE AIRLINES

BACKGROUND On September 8, 2021, Singapore opened its borders to fully vaccinated travellers from Germany, although there are various stringent requirements, detailed below.

The new initiative is called the Vaccinated Travel Lane (VTL) and is a new travel corridor for vaccinated persons, which can be used by both business travellers and holidaymakers to visit Singapore without quarantine restrictions. Germany along with the Sultanate of Brunei were the first countries to be signed up to the VTL, though with the hope that other countries would be included if this pilot project were successful.

The VTL means that the previously mandatory quarantine of at least 14 days upon arrival in the city-state has been waived, and travellers can move freely in Singapore. This is in contrast to the Green Lane for business travellers, which was introduced in November 2020 and discontinued after a few weeks.

The first prerequisite for being able to enter Singapore quarantine-free under the new arrangement is the use of so-called VTL flights. Open only to vaccinated persons, they operated until October 30 by Singapore Airlines (SIA) three times a week from Frankfurt (always on Tuesdays, Fridays and Sundays) and twice a week from Munich (always on Mondays and Wednesdays). According to SIA, these times will not change during the winter. On Thursdays and Saturdays Lufthansa offers VTL flights from Frankfurt. Travellers from Singapore to Germany are not bound to VTL flights and therefore can currently enter without quarantine if vaccinated, tested or recovered (known as 3G, because in German it is *geimpft*, *getestet*, *genesen*). Booking for these flights is as normal, but the SIA website informs you of the steps you have to take before flying.

> **For the first time since the pandemic began, the crew is serving from the trolley again, at least one of two meals**

CHECK-IN I arrived at 1800 for my 2200 departure on SQ325. People were already standing at SIA's check-in counters in Hall C of Terminal 1 at Frankfurt Airport. Many documents need checking, since Singapore's bureaucratic requirements are high. All passengers must be fully vaccinated, have been in Germany for a minimum of 21 days, present a negative PCR test result no older than 48 hours, and have a Vaccinated Travel Pass (VTP). To get this, travellers must fill in a form and answer all kinds of health questions, and the VTP must be issued between seven and 30 days prior to their intended date of entry into Singapore. If accepted by the Singapore government, a traveller gets an official confirmation and a VTP. Also required is the SG Arrival Card and a booking confirmation for a further PCR test on arrival at Changi Airport (all to be applied for and paid for online in advance). The TraceTogether app on the smartphone for contact tracking in Singapore must also be shown at check-in.

This is not only time-consuming before travel but also at check-in – ten minutes per passenger at best, despite four manned counters and the professionalism of the SIA staff. The papers are not always complete, and some have to be corrected. This first VTL flight took off with 106 passengers and waiting times were comfortable, but since interest is high, the airline and passengers will have to prepare for peak loads.

BOARDING Boarding started at 2125 and a temperature check of each passenger was conducted. At the aircraft door, the crew greeted us wearing medical masks and Plexiglass goggles. First class was fully booked, business class was 54 per cent occupied with 26 of 48 seats, another 15 passengers were in premium economy, 55 in economy. The total of 106 passengers is about double that of current non-VTL flights.

SIA's VTL flights are currently operated with a Boeing 777-300ER in a four-class configuration (first, business, premium economy, economy).

THE SEAT I was seated in 23A, a window seat at the rear of the business class cabin, which is arranged in a 1-2-1 configuration – each passenger has direct aisle access. At 28 inches wide, the seat is one of the leaders in the industry. There are two seating options – the Lazy Z, a cradling position that ensures your weight is centred and balanced when you're sitting down, and the Sundeck, a lounging position. The seat also flips to become a fully-flat bed when you're ready to sleep.

THE FLIGHT Shortly before 2200, the captain announced a flight time of 13 hours and 15 minutes – one hour longer than usual because the flight plan avoided airspace over Afghanistan. As we taxied out of the parking position, the on-board service had already begun with drinks offered and food orders taken. A light supper and a hot meal were offered with several options. For the first time since the pandemic began, the crew is serving from the trolley again, at least one of two meals.

Because the airline is increasingly moving its content to digital, and not just because of Covid 19, there are no longer any printed menus; instead they are at inflightmenu.singaporeair.com or via the SingaporeAir app. It is hygienic, sustainable, and may even be efficient, but it takes some getting used to. The app can also be used to control the KrisWorld entertainment program, create a personal playlist and access it on board, though there is also the usual handheld control. A free e-library with 150 publications is also available, as is the option to shop online in the KrisShop – shopping on-board is not currently available. For those who want to send text messages, Business Class guests have a free wifi package of 100MB per flight, with top-ups starting at US$3.99.

After the supper (a goat cheese tart with fig cream starter, tomato mozzarella omelette main, and green tea tiramisu) I lay down to sleep – thanks to a fully-flat bed and fine cotton bedding, I rested for a few hours and awoke with another 3.5 hours until landing.

Instead of continental breakfast (available on request), I ordered Indian lamb curry. The beverage list is complete again (after months of a reduced service). The popular satay service is also back – a sign of hope after months of pandemic-related abstinence.

We landed a few minutes late at Singapore Changi Airport (1738 Singapore time). It was a long but pleasant flight.

ARRIVAL The airport was empty, with around two dozen employees standing in the terminal, dressed in blue protective suits. Passengers went immediately to the immigration desk, where a photo and our fingerprints were taken and a lot of paperwork had to be done. I activated the TraceTogether app, picked up my bags and went to the pre-booked PCR test. All in all, the whole airport experience took just under an hour. A bus was waiting outside the door to take passengers to the hotel where a quarantine of several hours awaited us. We were not allowed to leave the room until the test result was available. I received it at 0200.

VERDICT The bureaucratic hurdles are enormous, but the VTL is a blessing for everyone travelling between Germany and Singapore. Visitors will be spared the agonising several-week hotel quarantine and will enjoy unimagined freedoms.

If this pilot project succeeds, Singapore will open up to more countries and, hopefully, encourage more transatlantic travel. Finally!

Sabine Galas

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WELCOME TO SINGAPORE CHANGI AIRPORT!
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1748

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COVID-19 核酸检测
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BEST FOR
Comfort of seat and bedding, excellent service
-

CONFIGURATION
1-2-1

SEAT WIDTH
28 inches

SEAT RECLINE
180 degrees

BED LENGTH
78 inches

FLIGHT DURATION
13 hours 15 minutes

PRICE
Internet rates for a return business class flight from Frankfurt to Singapore start at £1,990 (60 days advance purchase), £2,697 (no advance purchase); economy class tickets from £520. Prices subject to change

CONTACT
singaporeair.com

Canopy by Hilton Paris Trocadéro

BACKGROUND The lifestyle Canopy brand was launched in 2014, and has 31 properties around the world, with another 29 under development. It debuted in France with this hotel in May.

WHERE IS IT? On Avenue d'Eylau, just off the bustling Place du Trocadéro. It is a five-minute walk from Trocadéro metro station, and ten minutes to the Arc de Triomphe and Champs-Elysées.

WHAT'S IT LIKE? Formerly an electric factory, the 1930s façade now houses a seven-floor hotel designed by architect and interior designer Jean-Philippe Nuel. He has paid homage to its industrial roots while keeping it bright with Le Corbusier-style block shapes and a warm colour scheme of oranges and reds.

The open-plan lobby is well-designed with a range of seating areas for relaxing, working or dining – plus a small reception desk manned by two friendly staff. The main restaurant, bar and lounge lie straight ahead, with a glass roof overhead, and are cleverly partitioned with bookshelf-style screens. It's a great use of space and ideal for coworking or informal dining.

Check-in was quick and easy, and our room was ready ahead of the 3pm check-in time. Guests are required to show a "pass sanitaire" (vaccine passport) – the French authorities require both citizens and international travellers to hold a vaccination passport to access tourist attractions and hospitality services. You can also show your NHS Covid pass or a negative PCR test in digital or paper format.

Other Covid-19 protocols include face masks, hand sanitising stations and Clean Stay seals on the hotel room doors.

> Rooftop bar l'Eylau Paris offers a tapas-style menu, craft beer and cocktails

Lifts to the guestrooms require a keycard. The corridors have turquoise walls, block-coloured shapes and matching carpets, and huge windows offer views of Paris and a living wall on one of the hotel's façades.

ROOMS The hotel's 123 rooms and suites feature sleek, minimalist décor, floor-to-ceiling windows, and splashes of colour in the rugs and artwork. They differ in the views and configurations. All rooms measure 27 sqm, while suites range from 35 to 60 sqm and some include terraces.

Our twin Premium room on the fifth floor had extremely comfortable single beds with gel memory foam and Serta Cool Balance technology. We fell asleep instantly and had an undisturbed sleep thanks to the quiet corridors and effective blackout curtains. The bedside table features a radio alarm clock, and USB and plug sockets. There's a desk with plugs and an adjustable lamp.

All rooms include a large 55-inch TV, a Nespresso machine, a mini fridge, Apivita toiletries, bathrobes, an iron and ironing board, and refillable glass water bottles. In our room, the toilet was separate to the shower room, which had both a handheld and overhead shower.

FOOD AND DRINK L'Esprit Nouveau on the ground floor serves a continental breakfast (£24) of delicious pastries, eggs, cereals, fruit and yoghurt. In the evening, it switches to classic French dishes using sustainable and eco-friendly products. The rooftop terrace and bar l'Eylau Paris offers a tapas-style menu, craft beer and cocktails.

MEETINGS The hotel has four meeting rooms – the largest is 56 sqm. The rooftop bar is also ideal for cocktail receptions.

LEISURE There's a well-sized, 24-hour gym on the ground floor.

VERDICT This new hotel makes the most of its brilliant location with fantastic views, a lively rooftop bar and locally sourced products. The rooms and public spaces are also well-designed for work trips.
Hannah Brandler

BEST FOR
Its prime sightseeing location in the leafy 16th arrondissement

DON'T MISS
Rooftop views of the glistening Eiffel Tower at nightfall

PRICE
Internet rates for a flexible midweek stay in December started from £215 for a Queen Room

CONTACT
16 Avenue d'Eylau, Paris 75116;
(+33) 1 45 50 50 70; hilton.com

Native Mayfair

BACKGROUND Native is a UK aparthotel and serviced apartment provider with six aparthotels (London Mayfair, London Bankside, London Hyde Park, Manchester, Edinburgh and Glasgow) and a further six apartment locations – all in London.

In some sense this Mayfair property is unusual for Native, having only 11 units – all apartments. Most locations have many more – Native Manchester, for instance, has 166 units.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS Once booked, I received clear instructions on how to find the apartment and details of the keycode to access it. It is in a mews house on a side street. I arrived around 3pm, but if you are arriving late at night there is a four-figure pin code to enter the apartments. Unfortunately, instead of the keypad, I focused on the buzzers and pressed the doorbell of four different apartments before the resident manager came out and welcomed me. She gave me a keycard both for the outside door and the door of my apartment (for late arrivals it is put in a secure box in the lobby).

> This is a central but quiet location which allows you to live like a Mayfair resident

One advantage of having a resident manager is sorting out any initial problems. I had difficulty connecting to the internet, but this was remedied immediately by placing a router in the room next to the kitchen table where I was working. Answers to my questions on where to shop, eat and the quickest route to Bond Street station were all expertly answered. Few conciereges are so helpful.

WHERE IS IT? On Lees Place, about a five-minute walk from Marble Arch underground station and perhaps less than ten minutes from Bond Street station. It is a short stroll from North Audley Street which has some excellent restaurants. The large Marble Arch Marks and Spencers is nearby if you want to stock up on food to prepare in the kitchen.

WHAT'S IT LIKE? Native says it combines "the freedom and authenticity of a local apartment, with the comfort, convenience and premium service of a boutique hotel". It certainly feels like a stylish and spacious private residence. The small lobby has both steps up to the lift with access to all three floors or a well-lit central stairwell which leads to short corridors and the rooms. There are large Magritte prints on the walls, which makes a change from black-and-white photographs of London, and thick carpets kept noise to a minimum, though my apartment was next to the lift, and you could certainly hear when it was in use (thankfully, not often).

ROOMS There are 11 apartments in this property – two one-bedroom, six Premium one-bedroom, two two-bedroom and one Premium two-bedroom penthouse.

My apartment had a good-sized, well-equipped kitchen, with a washing machine/dryer and dishwasher, a toaster and kettle, Ringtons coffee and teas as well as some UHT milk in the fridge along with a couple of bottles of water. The design of the apartments is modern, with stained wood floors, rugs in the main living room, comfortable armchairs and a sofa, along with the kitchen table and chairs I worked at.

My bedroom had good lighting, including reading lights at night, and effective blackout curtains. It was also very quiet – there is little traffic in the surrounding streets, which is a bonus considering how central the apartment is. Only the rumble of the underground could be felt in the morning.

The bathroom was small, but had a bath with a shower (rain shower and power shower) above, though you would want to be reasonably confident stepping over the high edge to the bath to use either the shower or the bath. Toiletries are large glass bottles of Bramley products.

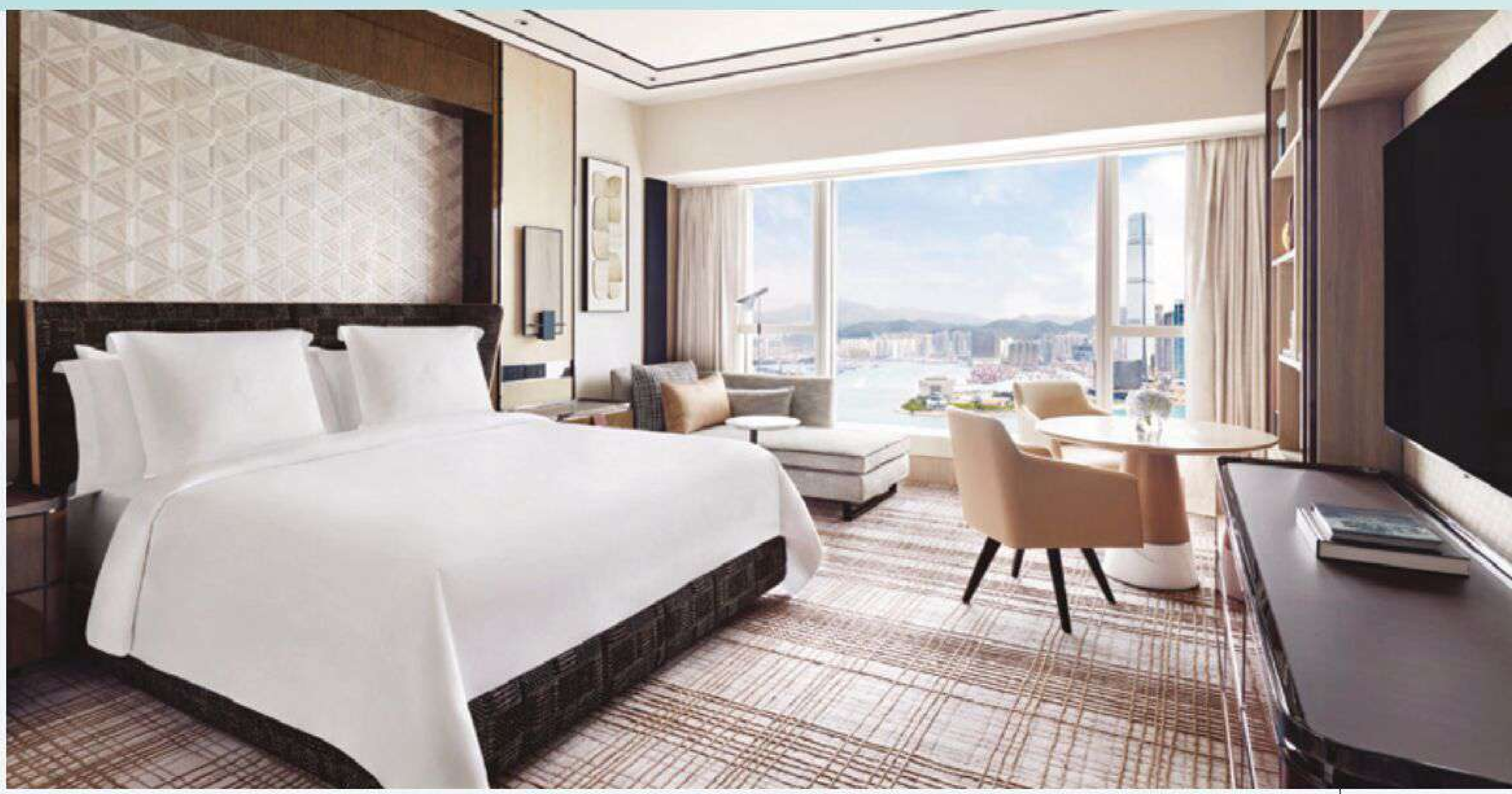
VERDICT This is a lovely, quiet location which, if your budget permits, allows you to live like a Mayfair resident. *Tom Otley*

BEST FOR
Location – close to Oxford Street and Park Lane, but quiet and residential.

DON'T MISS
North Audley Street and its restaurants or take a long leisurely walk in Hyde Park.

PRICE
Internet rates for a five-night minimum stay in December started from £340 for a one-bedroom apartment

CONTACT
10-12 Lees Place, London W1K 6LL
nativeplaces.com



Four Seasons Hotel Hong Kong

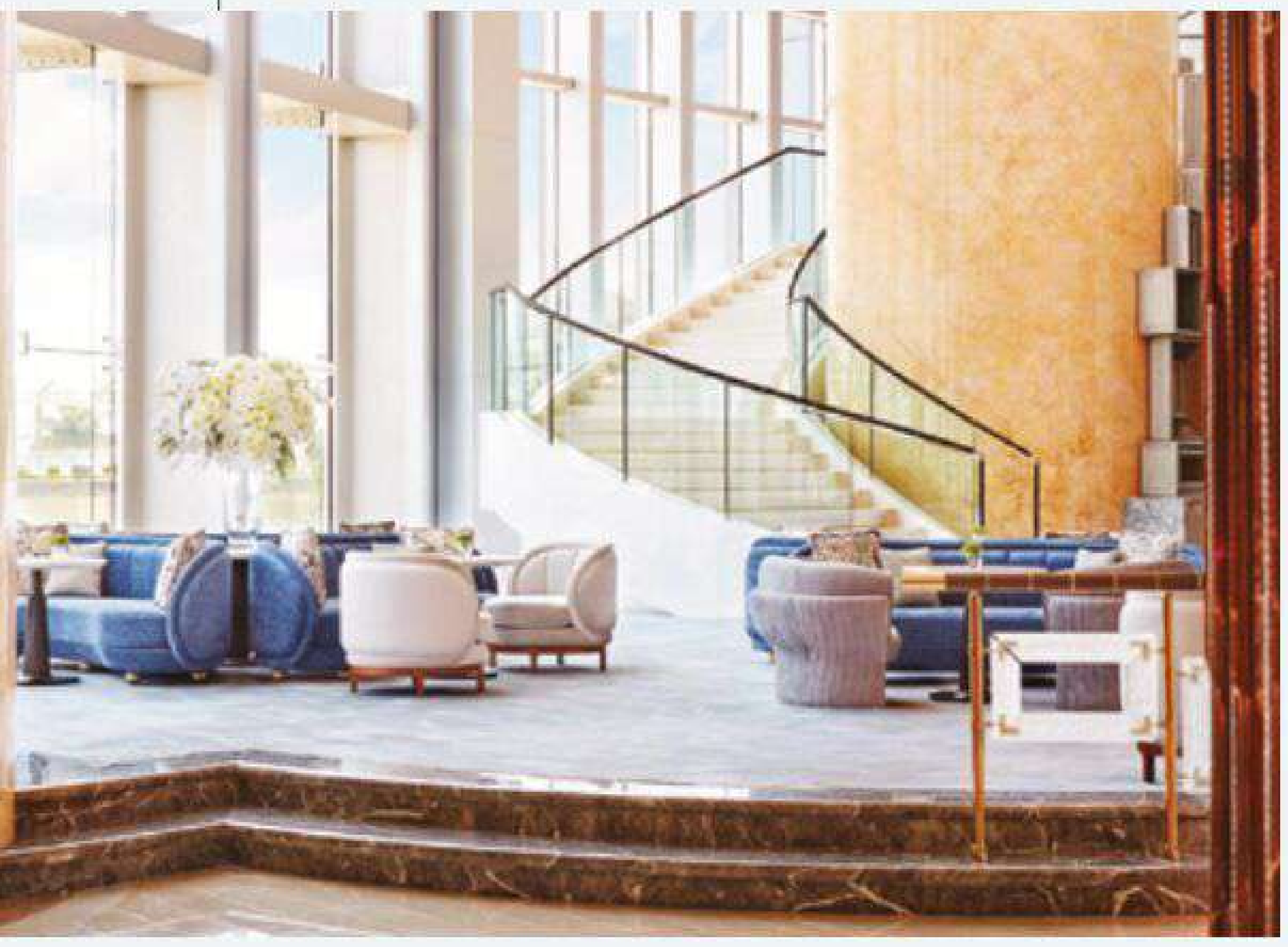
BACKGROUND The Four Seasons is one of Hong Kong's most prestigious addresses, famed for having eight Michelin stars under one roof. Completing the final stages of a renovation, the hotel features new rooms and suites, a lobby makeover and revamped drinking dens.

WHERE IS IT? Adjoining the IFC shopping mall in Central, within walking distance of the main business hub and entertainment hotspots. Excellent transport options range from the Airport Express and MTR to taxis and nearby Star Ferry.

WHAT'S IT LIKE? The hotel exudes luxury and elegance from the moment you arrive; staff greet you warmly as your luggage is whisked away. The new lobby now features Galley – an open-plan lounge and bar, where the lunchtime crowd are dressed head to toe in Versace, with a Rolex or two peeking from tailored cuffs.

ROOMS The 399 rooms and suites are generously sized, starting at 45 sqm. I stayed in one of the newly renovated Grand Harbour View Suites: a 68 sqm corner unit.

The old traditional Chinese aesthetic has been replaced with a contemporary look by Remedios Studio: clean, sleek lines, modern leather furnishings and a soothing palette of moody blues and greys. But the starring feature is the view. Floor-to-ceiling windows offer a 180-degree panorama over Victoria Harbour, Kowloon and beyond.



Smart flatscreen TVs feature in the bedroom and lounge, with mirroring technology to stream Netflix content. A circular table offers a place for working or dining, with power sockets nearby.

A cabinet area is fully stocked with Nespresso machine, pre-mixed Caprice Negroni (HK$290, £27) and an elegant range of chinaware and glasses. Complimentary Evian water bottles are replenished daily, along with a fruit bowl and pot of tea.

> The old traditional Chinese aesthetic has been replaced with a contemporary look

The bed is enormous, with a pillow and duvet menu to customise the perfect sleeping environment. Handy dimmer and blackout-blind switches are located on both sides, as well as double plugs and USB sockets. A dressing area is stocked with plush robes and slippers.

Beautiful marble bathrooms feature dual sinks, a soaking tub, (book your complimentary Himalayan Salt bath ritual before 5pm), separate rain shower and smart toilet. Fragrant Bulgari amenities and a Dyson hairdryer are notable treats.

Guests who upgrade to the 45th floor Executive Club can also enjoy breakfast, snacks, afternoon tea and a light supper, plus views from a wraparound balcony.

FOOD AND DRINK The three Michelin-starred French fine dining restaurant Caprice served up an exquisite experience, with an ingredient list featuring Scottish langoustines, caviar and English lamb, presented by a discreet army of knowledgeable waiters and sommeliers.

The three-star Cantonese feast at Lung King Heen was just as delicous, and every dish was a treat.

Newcomer Argo bar replaces Blue Bar with a conservatory-style theme that offers a gorgeous, gilded hangout. Meanwhile, the classic Caprice bar has old-world glamour for a cosier setting, with a modern drinks and nibbles list. Reservations are recommended for all outlets.

MEETINGS A range of fully equipped meeting spaces, including a 24-hour business centre and a 708 sqm ballroom.

LEISURE An infinity pool, lap pool, hot tub and cold plunge pool overlook the harbour, with cabana day loungers. The spa features extensive facilities, though the sauna and steam room are closed during Covid.

VERDICT Gorgeous new rooms, and a wealth of wellness-focused facilities, make the Four Seasons easily one of the best options in Hong Kong. *Tamsin Cocks*

BEST FOR

Endless dining, wellness and spa offerings

DON'T MISS

A one-on-one Chakra Meditation with in-house specialist Dr Tania Bardhan

PRICE

Internet rates for a flexible midweek stay in December started from £780 (including service charge) for a newly renovated Grand Harbour View Suite

CONTACT

8 Finance Street, Central, Hong Kong
tel+(852) 3196 8333; fourseasons.com/hongkong

Hyatt Centric Ginza Tokyo

BACKGROUND The Hyatt Centric Ginza Tokyo was the first Hyatt Centric in Asia-Pacific when it opened in 2018. Since then, another has opened in Kanazawa, a city that pre-pandemic was emerging as an alternative destination to Kyoto.

WHERE IS IT? In a prime location in the heart of the upscale Ginza district, one of Tokyo's premier dining and shopping areas. It's a couple of minutes on foot to the swanky Ginza Six shopping complex and Mitsukoshi department store, as well as Ginza Station. It's also a short taxi ride to Tokyo Station and the Marunouchi and Otemachi business districts.

WHAT'S IT LIKE? It doesn't have the opulence of five-star sister brand the Andaz in Tokyo's Toranomon neighbourhood – there's no spa or pool and just two dining options. The primary target seems to be 30- to 40-something leisure and business travellers, with the focus on providing basic needs instead of non-essentials that would drive rates higher.

That's not to say it isn't plush. The spacious fourth-floor library-lounge has an extremely sleek feel with dark woods and deepish red and copper tones, and a chic hipster tinge thanks to retro Pac Man and Space Invaders arcade machines, comfy couches, and hotel pet: a robotic Aibo dog.

Add in staff uniforms that are more Apple store than the usual formal attire of Tokyo's upper-end hotels, and the overall package is refreshingly welcoming and unstuffy.

ROOMS Spread across the 5th to 12th floors are 164 rooms and suites. The 11th floor One King Bed Deluxe room I stayed in was 47 sqm and, like all non-standard rooms, overlooked Namiki-dori, a prime shopping street – albeit there wasn't all that much to see beyond other buildings. Design-wise, it was a continuation of the sleek lobby style, with natural woods and yellow and red hues. Furniture highlights included a day bed and a handy work-desk-cum-dining table, while the bathroom featured a separate bathtub and shower.

The rooms are fun to unwind in, with thoughtful attention to detail throughout: electronic blinds and blackout shades, large wall-mounted LCD TV (50 inches in my room), Nespresso machine, a laptop-sized safe, Bose Bluetooth speaker, eco-conscious Beekind bath products, bathrobes and yukata gowns.

The differences between rooms mostly comes down to size. The entry-level Twin and Kings are 35 sqm, while suites have separate bedrooms and come in at 77 sqm, apart from the 127 sqm Namiki Suite.

> The overall package is refreshingly welcoming and unstuffy

FOOD AND DRINK There are two options – both on the third floor and both open to non-guests. At Namiki667, chef Toru Hirakawa focuses on slow-roasted dishes using ingredients sourced predominantly in and around Tokyo. The dinner menu includes à la carte and four- and five-course options and it's also open for lunch and breakfast. Due to the Covid-19 state of emergency in Tokyo, breakfast was served in-room only during my stay – and had to be ordered 30 minutes ahead of time.

The adjoining Namiki667 Bar and Lounge focuses on coffee, sweets and original cocktails. Again, this was temporarily suspended during my stay, but there are usually music nights and a 4pm to 6pm happy hour. Both venues share access to a lovely open-air terrace.

Of course, this being Ginza, a hotel here doesn't need much else. There are hundreds of bars and restaurants, including several Michelin-starred sushi joints and many other more affordable restaurants in the area. Staff can help make reservations.

MEETINGS The Namiki Suite can be used as an event space for up to 20 people. There's also a 110 sqm multi-function area in Namiki667 with a built-in 120-inch screen and projector that can host up to 60 guests, plus an additional private dining room that can accommodate up to 30.

LEISURE There's a complimentary 24-hour fitness centre with cardio machines, yoga mats, and weights

VERDICT The Hyatt Centric Ginza Tokyo delivers plush, functional, and friendly accommodation, with a superb location for shopping, eating, and doing business in central Tokyo. *Rob Goss*

BEST FOR
The location – Tokyo's best restaurants and shops are right on the doorstep

DON'T MISS
Browsing books and relaxing with a coffee at the library-lounge

PRICE
Internet rates for a flexible midweek stay in December started from £132 (including service charge and tax) for an entry-level King or Twin room

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The 2021 travel checklist

TRAVEL
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IMMUNITY
COVID-19
PASSPORT
COVID-19
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ISTOCK

WHAT ARE THE ENTRY REQUIREMENTS?
Before departing for your destination (or even choosing a location), you should check the requirements for entry into the country and for re-entry home. These can change regularly, but you can find all the relevant information on the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) website or overseas government websites. Airlines such as British Airways and Easyjet have also created Covid-19 information hubs, which allow visitors to see the travel restrictions in place in each country on their network.

DO I NEED TO TAKE A TEST?
Some countries still require proof of a negative Covid-19 test for entry depending on your vaccination status. Check whether you need to take a PCR test, which can take 24 to 48 hours to receive results, or the more rapid antigen (lateral flow) test which can be completed at home and gives a result within 30 minutes. You will also need to make sure that you take the test in the right timeframe, which ranges from 24 to 72 hours depending on the destination. To make matters more complicated, this timeframe can apply to 'pre-departure' or 'pre-arrival/landing.'

You must also check if you need to take a test to return home after your trip. If this is the case, plan ahead, find and book an appointment with Covid-19 testing providers at your destination. If you are only required to take a lateral flow test, then you can buy a rapid antigen test and carry it in your hand luggage. Note that to re-enter the UK, it is no longer necessary to take a pre-departure test, but you must arrange a Day 2 lateral flow test and may need to submit a booking reference into the passenger locator form.

WILL I NEED TO QUARANTINE?
The requirement for quarantine tends to be dependent on the numbers of Covid-19 cases in the country of departure. Some countries will demand that you self-isolate, while others exempt those who are fully vaccinated, have recently recovered from the virus, or show proof of a negative PCR test.

Note that while the UK's traffic light system was scrapped last month, the red list has remained for countries with a high incidence of Covid-19. Travellers returning from such countries will have to book a hotel quarantine package via gov.uk/coronavirus (click link to International Travel), which will cost you £2,285 for ten days and two Covid tests. If you have not arranged this before arriving in England, you can be fined up to £4,000 (and will still have to pay for your quarantine package on arrival).

DO I NEED TO DOWNLOAD A VACCINE PASSPORT?
In short, yes. Fully vaccinated travellers, or those who have had a positive PCR test within the past six months, should download a digital PDF of the NHS Covid Pass from the NHS app and print off a copy in case (God forbid) your phone runs out of battery during your travels. You will be required to show proof of vaccination at border control (via the QR code) or a paper version, and you may also be asked to upload this into your booking with an airline or rail provider before arriving at the terminus. Note that the pass lasts for 30 days, so check the expiry date and re-download the pass if it has expired. You can also request a Covid Pass letter online if you do not have the app – nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/covid-pass/

WHAT OTHER FORMS DO I NEED?
It is likely that you will need to fill in a form providing personal information and travel details. These forms have various names, including the UK's Passenger Locator Form and the EU Digital Passenger Locator Form (dPLF) – which is only for Italy, Malta and Slovenia – so make sure that you are using the correct version for your destination. It might be that you only need to complete a 'sworn statement' certifying that you do not have Covid symptoms and have not been in contact with a confirmed case in the preceding fortnight. You may be asked to show either a digital or paper version of the document at the border.

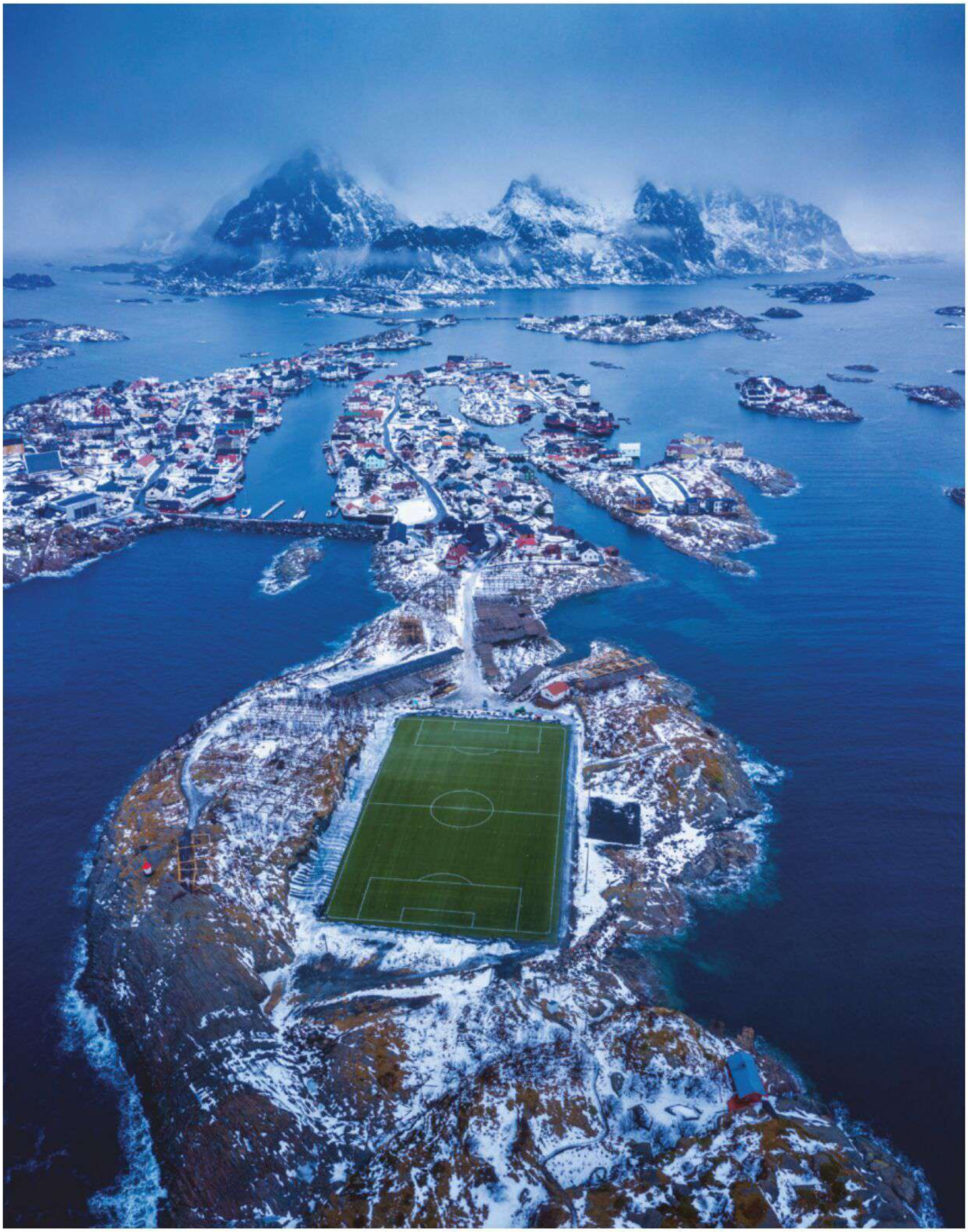
IS MY MASK PERMITTED?
While we're all accustomed to wearing masks, some countries and transport services have strict rules on the type of face covering allowed. Check whether the likes of cloth masks, face shields or masks with an exhaust valve are allowed in your destination, on-board your chosen airline or rail provider. Many of these services instead require a surgical mask, or a FFP2 (filtering face piece), KN95 or N95 mask, as they provide extra protection.

CAN I CHANGE OR CANCEL MY BOOKING?
Check whether you can amend or cancel your booking free of charge if you need to postpone travel plans. Most companies have extended their flexible booking policies because of the ongoing travel uncertainty, waiving the change fee and offering refunds or travel vouchers in the event of cancellation.

SHOULD I BUY INSURANCE?
When travelling during a global pandemic, it is wise to purchase travel and health insurance. Despite Brexit, the European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) still works for Brits up until the card's expiry date. After that, UK travellers will have to apply for a Global Health Insurance Card (GHIC). The UK government, however, advises that travellers should still purchase travel insurance which includes health cover as the two cards do not cover private medical healthcare. Shop around for the best provider, and make sure to check whether the policies cover Covid-19-related incidents.

WHAT ARE THE LOCAL RULES?
Regulations differ around the world – from caps on group numbers to curfews and proof of vaccination or a negative test to enter establishments – so check ahead of departure to ensure your trip is as smooth as possible.

THE BIG PICTURE



NANDO HARMSEN/DRONE PHOTO AWARDS 2021

Play to win

The Drone Photo Awards is ideal for those of us that enjoy views from above 10,000 metres. The annual international contest focuses on aerial photography and video, and this year saw tens of thousands of submissions from 102 countries. Dutch photographer Nando Harmsen was highly commended in the Urban category for his depiction of a football field in the fishing village of Henningsvaer in Norway, in which the green artificial grass stands out against the wintry Nordic landscape. The winning photos are on display at the Museum of Natural History of the Accademia dei Fisiocritici in Siena, Italy, until December 5, or you can view the full gallery at *droneawards.photo*

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